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L'AMÉRICAINNE

BY
Jules Claretie



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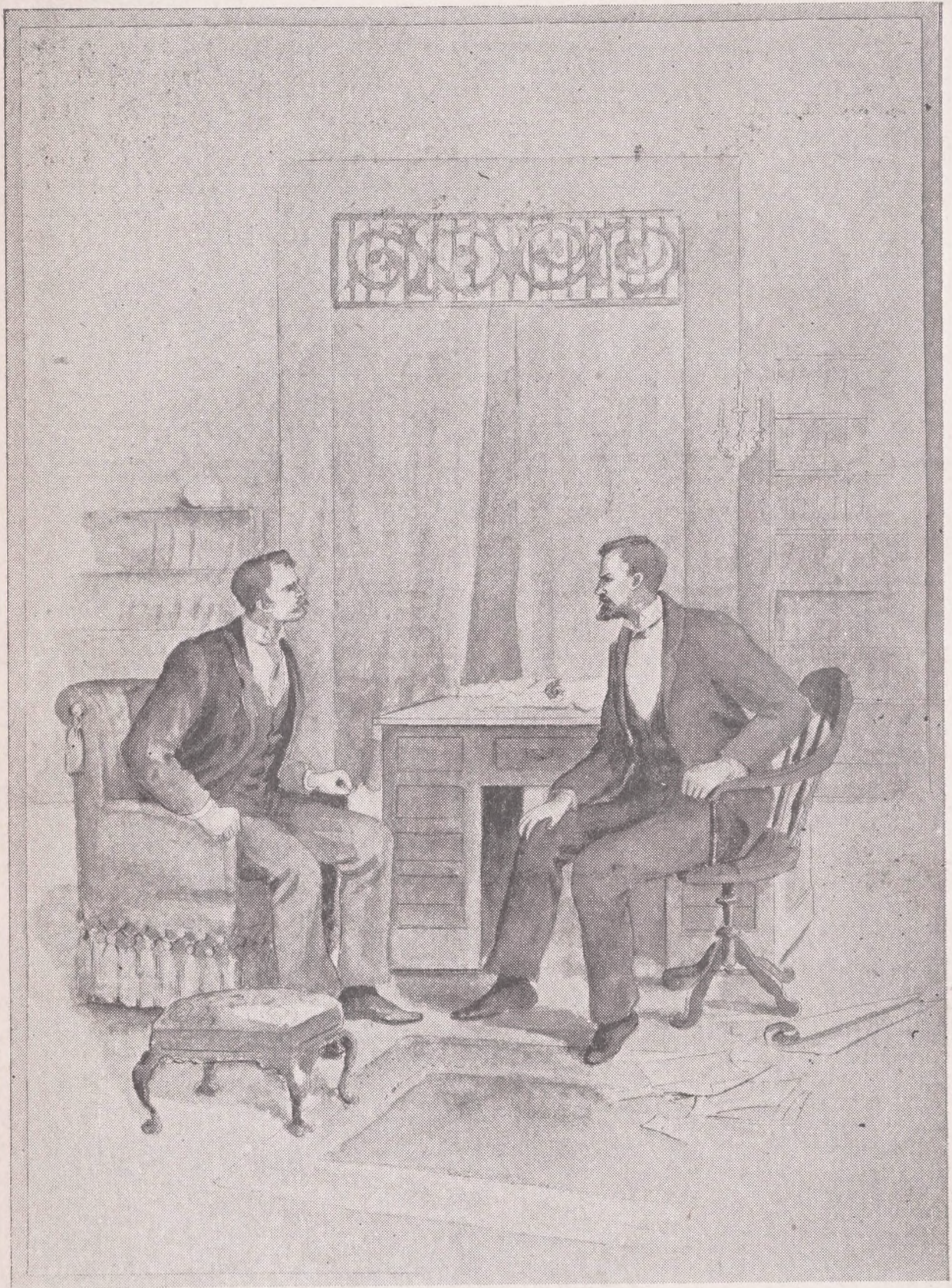
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LET THE HUSBAND SUFFER, IT IS HIS LOT. Page 340.

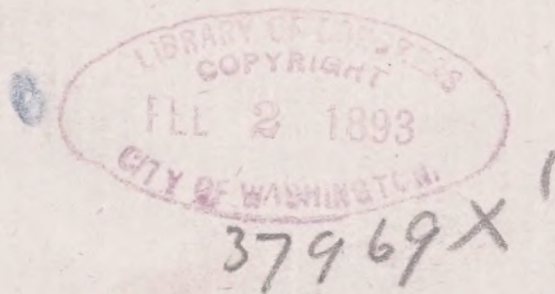
L'AMÉRICAINÉ

BY

JULES CLARETIE.

TRANSLATED BY

WILLIAM HENRY SCUDDER.



CHICAGO.

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MADAME H. S. S.

Permit me, madam, to send you, from Paris to Philadelphia, this book, in which you will find more than one observation, more than one trait, which I have borrowed from the eminent statesman, the profound philosopher and the charming conversationalist whose honored name you bear. I have not pretended, in this quasi-Parisian romance, to paint the domestic manners of your country-women. I have seized *au passage* the American types I have seen, and I have wished neither to make a picture nor a satire of life in the New World. Do not look for the special study of a race under this title: L'Americaine. Seek only, what I hope you will find, the portrait of a woman.

What I have especially aimed at, to be candid, in the romance I send you, madam, is not America, but divorce, which, by the way, is an American importation. With you, divorces are obtained with prodigious facility. We have not yet reached the same condition of things in France, but we are approaching it rapidly, and it might not be amiss to inaugurate a movement of reaction. You will the more

approve what I have done, madam, I am sure, because your own American fireside is a nest of affections and memories, crowned with the dear image of him who has honored me with his friendship.

Be pleased to receive, madam, across the chasm of time and space, the homage of my profound respect.

JULES CLARETIE.

CHAPTER I.

AT Trouville, on a fine clear day in July, under a soft blue sky lightly flecked with white clouds, before the sea smooth and green, its beach edged with a lace-work of white foam, Dr. Fargeas, the celebrated neurologist, sat talking, under the shade of a large umbrella planted in the fine sand. While talking he was looking at the vessels passing along the horizon, among them a steamer with its long wake of black smoke. In his character of art amateur, he was comparing the violet colored coast line of Cape de la Hève, which showed in the distance with its red and yellow tints, to the water color marine sketches which were hanging in his own cabinet in Paris.

The doctor liked to give himself up to these idle, rambling talks on his days of rest and leisure. He was seated between two men, the one about thirty-five years old, with a soldierly air, the Marquis de Solis, who had just returned from Tonquin, and had stopped the night before at the Hotel Roches Noires; the other, a young man wearing a light straw hat, with a broad ribbon, who, stretched

out in a large wicker chair, with legs crossed, was idly tapping his left shoe with the end of his silk umbrella. This was M. de Bernière, a handsome young fellow, a distant cousin of the Marquis de Solis. He was as much an idler and scoffer, decadent and pessimist according to the mode, in his intellectual way, as Georges de Solis, with only ten years more upon his shoulders, was enthusiastic and credulous, traveling all over the world in quest of scientific truths. Dr. Fargeas had also remained ardent and alert, in spite of his long gray locks which now set off his thin visage and gave it character.

They had met after dinner and had mechanically seated themselves on the beach in the delicious *far niente* of that seaside life, the doctor coming from his villa, built in a nest of verdure, in the direction of Grâce; Bernière and de Solis from the same hotel where they had chanced to meet without any preconcerted arrangement. Fargeas had formerly treated the Marchioness de Solis and from time to time gave hygienic counsel to M. de Bernière, who did not follow it. The good doctor was a friend to all his patients. To the imaginary invalids, those who were simply ænemic or rendered dyspeptic by a life in Paris, he applied a treatment peculiar to himself,

a let-alone method. He would banter them, shrugging his shoulders, and would dismiss them with a "Bah, it is nothing! You will soon see the end of it."

"Well, doctor, how are your patients?" asked Bernière, continuing to tap with his umbrella his ankle, which showed beneath the elastic of his gaiter.

"My patients? They are all doing well!"

And the doctor added laughingly:

"I visit them so seldom."

"It is you alone who have the right to speak in this mocking tone of your science, dear doctor," said M. de Solis. He spoke with an evident respect, a sort of affectionate gratefulness. "You are one of the masters of the art of healing!"

"Oh! one of the masters!" The savant nodded his head. "The truth is that I am among physicians one of the least—mischievous!"

Bernière smiled and beat a yet quicker tattoo with his umbrella by way of applause.

"Mischievous is good!" he said.

"But we put the word mischievous under the ban!"

"Well," said Fargeas, "I am a skeptic in medicine. That is my strong point. I have noticed, taking everything into consideration, that there are

no real maladies except those we imagine we have. When a man is really in danger, he thinks there is nothing serious the matter. This ignorance of his disease reassures him and he recovers in spite of the doctor. When the man or woman is an imaginary invalid, the physician is consulted at every turn. Then the danger begins!"

"Then, according to your idea, there are no maladies except imaginary ones?" asked M. de Solis.

"Evidently, as the only passions are those we believe we have experienced."

Young Bernière, after having applauded, began to protest.

"Oh! those we believe we have experienced!" he said.

Dr. Fargeas paused and looked at this handsome young man—blond, curled, with a slight moustache delicately turned up at the corners of his mouth, with rather colorless lips, and a monocle which contorted the whole of one side of his face like a hemiplegy, while the other side remained normally calm, lighted by a small, piercing blue eye, and said:

"Certainly. You see—but hold, how old are you?"

"Twenty-eight years."

"And at twenty-eight, you think you have had a passion?"

"Several of them," answered Bernière.

"Are you fond of play?"

"A little," answered Bernière.

"Are you a book worm?"

"Well! so so; I cut the leaves of the volumes with my fingers—thus!"

"Are you a miser? I beg your pardon for the question."

"My father thinks I am a spendthrift," Bernière replied, "but Emilienne—Emilienne Delannoy, no—she—quite the contrary! No, I am not a miser."

"Then you have no passions! No," said Fargeas, "neither horses, gaming nor women; not even the little—"

"Emilienne, of the opera bouffe."

"No, none of these are passions. They are occupations, yes, amusements, perhaps!"

"Ah! ah!" said the young man with an air of profound ennui, "amusements? sometimes!"

"Rarely, I know it," added the doctor by way of accentuating Bernière's admission, "but passions, no! You must see this yourself. You say 'ah! ah!' A passion is something which seizes you, body and soul, which holds you, crushes you, absorbs you,

slowly kills you and yet lets you live. I have known but two men who had what could be called a passion—a true and absolute passion. One was a noble fellow who sought to abolish suffering. He died a maniac. The other was an old sculptor, who had failed in his ambitions and who passed his life in carving cocoanuts, certain that in each one he would cut a *chef d'œuvre*. He died an idiot. And it is no more stupid to be enamored of a beautiful dream, or to brutalize oneself over the carving of nuts, than to lose one's life for a woman."

Bernière listened to Fargeas with a smile on his face, as he would have listened to a song of gallantry, or to a lecture. He did not seem to be much interested. He responded in his slow, drawling voice:

"My cousin Solis is here, however, to prove to you, doctor, that there are other passions than those of carving cocoanuts!"

"How?"

"Why! A noble passion—that of traveling!"

"But you see that M. de Solis has not experienced this passion completely, entirely, even to the point of dying for it, since he has come home."

"But one gets tired of everything, doctor,"

answered the Marquis de Solis, who was mechanically tracing a map upon the sand of the beach; some chimerical map, no doubt.

Dr. Fargeas laughed a little triumphantly.

“One tires of everything. Well, I said nothing else!”

“Then in your opinion, love—”

“Oh, I do not believe in it!” said Bernière.

“But I believe in it, on the contrary,” said Fargeas, “as I believe in medicine. I believe in facts. I believe in the love of a wife for a husband who makes her happy, of a husband for the wife who makes him proud of her, of the parents for the child. I believe in all the loves which are accompanied by an adjective—conjugal love, filial love, paternal love. What you will, I believe in self-love especially; but I do not believe in simple, unqualified love. Such love is only a cheat. It pretends to wings. Bah! It has paws—and claws!”

“That is to say,” said M. de Solis, “putting your theory into practice, there is no other passion for every man than that of his fireside, and no safety except in marriage.”

“That is it!” exclaimed Fargeas, radiantly.

“Then,” said Bernière, who thought to embarrass the doctor, “why are you not married?”

"I? Because I have a passion."

"Science?"

"Precisely."

"But you do not believe in it," said the young man.

"There are so many imbeciles," said Fargeas, shrugging his shoulders, "who, without having learned anything, think they know everything. There is not too much time in a whole life of work for one to be convinced that he knows nothing! And then, I have not found the woman who—the woman—"

"Ah! I have caught you! You have been looking for an amour!"

"Or an interest."

"You an interest? Never in your life."

The Marquis de Solis, while this bantering talk was going on, was watching, without really seeing them, the fisher-women bringing from the sea, spade in hand, those long, silvery-hued carp, which hide their pike-like heads in the sand and are thus taken. There were also shrimp fishers carrying their nets on their shoulders, while others followed loaded with baskets, a long line of toilers of the sea.

He was looking, I have said, at these fisher folk; but his thought was elsewhere. All that he heard

spoken by those about him seemed to awaken in him memories, dormant sensations, to galvanize into a fictitious life, dead sorrows, and his fine face, a little saddened, meager and pale, with his brow becoming a little bald; with his black and pointed beard; this face of a thoughtful soldier had an expression of melancholy reverie.

From this reverie the marquis seemed at last to tear himself in order to ask the doctor:

“You are then of the opinion that there is always for a man an ideal woman, made expressly for him, and who is the incarnation, the realization of his dreams?”

“I am of the opinion that for every man there are even several,” answered the doctor, gaily.

“Good; but how is it for the women?” said Bernière.

“Oh! For the women! Ask Emilienne Delanoy. Ask Mrs. Montgomery, who is a respectable woman, and yet she has already changed her—ideal!

“Madame Montgomery?” And Bernière seemed to expect that Dr. Fargeas would explain himself.

“How, doctor, the handsome Madame Montgomery has changed her—ideal. How is that?”

"Oh, legally. She is divorced. But my dear Bernière, however respectable a woman may be——"

"Who does not love her husband?"

"Why does not Madame Montgomery love her husband?"

"Because he has no—ideal I suppose."

"That depends. We do not know that," said the doctor gravely.

"Well! if Mr. Montgomery, who is short and fat, is the ideal of Mrs. Montgomery, who is in fact, admirably beautiful, handsome enough for a sculptor's model, to be painted, to be raved over in verse, so much the worse for the rest of us who can only despair."

"Or console ourselves with Emilienne Delannoy, Fanny Richards, or Marianne d' Hozier. There is no lack of consolations. They are bought and sold, and, like the commodity called alcohol, they abound everywhere."

"And this handsome Mrs. Montgomery," asked M. de Solis. "She is —"

"An admirable and intoxicating creature!" answered Bernière. "She is an American, like all women whose portraits furnish advertisements to the tobacconists and vendors of perfumes. Since the season began she has made a revolution in Trouville

—an ebullition, if you like the term better. There is no one on the turf of beauty—you see that I am a modernist—who is comparable to her, unless it be Miss Arabella Dickson! Ah! She is incomparable. At the hour when Miss Arabella takes her bath, boatloads of sight-seers come from Deauville to look at her arms and neck. Carriages are at a premium at that psychologic moment. Besides, she is really handsome. She is worth seeing.”

“And who is this Miss Dickson?” asked de Solis.

“She is the daughter of a colonel, a fine looking man. There is nothing of the trifler about him. He is a Yankee—a Mohican—a type. It appears that he has fought Indians, revolver in hand, at the head of a band of cowboys—like Buffalo Bill, you know. I met him the other day at the gaming booths in the Casino. There was a circle around the Dickson trio—for there is a mother. She is very handsome also. The Dicksons are all three handsome. Besides”—and Bernière stretched himself out in his wicker chair with an air of affected nonchalance—“this whole race of Americans puts to the blush our pessimistic ideas. We have an ænemic air, as the doctor would say, by the side of these colossi carved in stone. Now look at Mr. Norton, for instance.”

“Norton!” said M. de Solis.

The name made him turn his head suddenly and he looked inquiringly at Bernière as if to ask what Norton his cousin could be talking about.

“Why! Mr. Norton, the rich Mr. Norton, the millionaire. To be more explicit still, Mr. Richard Hepworth Norton, the banker, who has bought the hotel of the Duchess d’ Escard, in the Park Monceau, and has stocked it with seven or eight million francs worth of pictures, not to speak of telephones!”

Richard Norton! That name awoke in the mind of the marquis a world of memories. He had known this Norton formerly in New York, and now he had found him again on this Normandy coast, after what a separation and what wanderings.

“He is here? Norton?”

“Over yonder,” said Fargeas. “That large Norman mansion, one of the last toward the Hotel Roches Noires, is his dwelling. You can see it from here.”

The marquis no longer directed his gaze toward the sea but looked in the direction of that long line of diversified constructions, elegant or bizarre, which opened their windows on the sea like eyes eager for the light.

“Over yonder—you see? A real palace, that

villa! Mr. Norton has amassed a great profusion of rareties there. It would be a museum in Paris! At Trouville it is a veritable curiosity. But nothing is costly and luxurious enough in Mr. Norton's eyes for the wife whom he adores, and who is besides the most exquisite creature I know."

The doctor did not notice the expression of vague sadness which passed rapidly over the face of de Solis. At the name of Mrs. Norton, the marquis had started slightly and his features contracted with a passing spasm which ordinarily would not have escaped Fargeas, but at this moment he was scanning the landscape through his half-closed eye-lashes to judge the quality of the light.

M. de Solis immediately recovered his equanimity, and assuming an expression of indifference, he questioned the doctor about Mrs. Norton with the air of one curious to know the current gossip of the beach.

The doctor was the better acquainted with the American lady because he was her physician. She was suffering with an indisposition not very well understood in New York—a disease of the nerves, the famous nervous prostration—but which the French master understood at a glance; the germ of cardiac affection, something resembling angina pec-

toris. On the whole a pseudonym of sadness. The death of her father, whom she worshipped, had affected the young woman deeply, and it was to tear her away from a sort of constant melancholy, from a grief which could always be divined, even under the smile of this woman of the world, that Richard Norton had brought his wife to France.

"Then this Mrs. Norton is melancholy?" asked M. de Solis.

"Yes, and resigned."

"And adorable," added M. de Bernière. "She has wonderful hair—a bright chestnut brown, almost bronze—and eyes! The sea has tints of blue which describe them exactly. Look!"

"Only," said Dr. Fargeas, "this poetic and delicious creature came near paying dear for the consultation I have given her, in the voyage across the Atlantic. The wind, the gales, the barometric depressions brought on an almost complete cessation of the heart's action. It was as if life itself had stopped. Fugitive phenomena, however, which will disappear radically with repose."

It seemed that having brought out these statements by his questions, M. de Solis now sought to avoid further discussion of the fair American. He sat still, his gaze fixed on the great house, but he

talked of other subjects, of his travels, of Anam and Tonquin, whence he had lately returned.

“Madame de Solis must have been very happy to see you again,” said the doctor.

“My mother! Poor, dear woman. I almost reproach myself for leaving her when I see how rejoiced she is to have me with her again. How thankful I am to you, doctor, for having saved her life for me.”

“Saved! saved! My dear marquis, we do not save the lives of those whom death has marked for his own. I deserve no greater credit than for having given good advice to the marchioness, which she followed. She has done more for the re-establishment of her health than I. When I tell you that I have some doubts as to the entire efficacy of medicine, I do not underestimate the value of the suggestions which physicians may give their patients, and which, by the aid of the imagination, often effect a cure. I have produced astonishing results by prescribing, with a becoming gravity of expression, pellets of *mica panis—mica panis!* The patients would swallow them with a shiver of disgust and hope. Then they would imagine themselves better—*mica panis*; translation—bread crumbs! Ah! the human brain, the imagination, the chimera!”

And now the conversation wandered on generalities, medicine, the morning news, the article in the *Vie Parisienne* devoted to the shoulders and the bathing dresses of Miss Arabella Dickson. It was Bernière who talked, but M. de Solis was not listening. It was as if his thought had been transported to the villa, which showed itself, with its red gables, at the end of a vista of glaring beach. And suddenly, almost brusquely, he left his cousin and the doctor talking, giving each a shake of the hand, pretending that he had forgotten to write a letter, or that he had an important telegraphic despatch to forward, and disappeared in the street.

The doctor, looking at his watch, also remembered an engagement and departed, leaving Bernière alone in his wicker chair smoking a cigar which, in his character of pessimist, he insisted should be of the best brand; for while citing Schopenhauer, he practiced Epicurus.

Keen observer that he was, the mental agitation of M. de Solis had not escaped his notice, and he asked himself why the marquis had parted company with him so suddenly. Solis had said nothing to him about an important letter. They had agreed to go horseback riding within the half hour. Could the marquis have forgotten it? Then the eagerness

of de Solis to learn the details of the health of Mrs. Norton; the evident interest the marquis took in what the doctor said concerning his fair patient gave Bernière some vague ideas of a half formed romance, of a possible intrigue.

“Come, come! This fine Count Solis!” But the thought itself vanished with the smoke of his cigar, in the open air of this beautiful day.

Bernière soon forgot his cousin in noting the approach of a short, fat man, with a very red face, whose hair and whiskers were beginning to turn gray. This man, without umbrella, was coming toward him, with his hands in his pockets, and was sniffing the air with the apparent enjoyment of a healthy being to whom mere existence is a pleasure.

“Why! it is Mr. Montgomery!” It was indeed he, the husband of the handsome Mrs. Montgomery, the man the most sought after, the most envied, the most jealously hated man on the beach, and who bore most philosophically the weight of his wife’s beauty.

“Ah! M. de Bernière!” said the fat little man, smiling. “Well! what are you doing here, Mr. Schopenhauer? You are digesting, I’ll wager. But disenchanté as you are, should you not allow yourself to die of inanition, since life is a burden?”

"A burden, yes; but a curious one," said Bernière, throwing away his unfinished cigar. "It is like a play; sometimes awfully stupid, but yet a play. You have some time been in the theatre when the piece was bad——"

"Often," said the American, with the slightest Saxon accent.

He had seated himself near Bernière, on a chair whose legs were driven into the sand by his weight.

"And the piece was tediously long, and everybody wanted to go home. But they didn't; they remained," said M. de Bernière. "They remained, they knew not why. It was because, being there, they did not want to get up and disturb the others. That is life, my dear Mr. Montgomery."

"Oh, there are many little relieving circumstances about life! But you are right, all the same; nothing is so stupid as a heavy play. They played such a one at the Casino yesterday. It was terrible. And what actors! There was one comedienne, who, they pretended, was a graduate from the Conservatory. And her age—good heavens!"

"Perhaps she dated from the time of Talma!"

"And I stayed through it all, because my wife did not want to leave. She always wants to see

everything. She is no pessimist. Indeed, everything amuses her; everything, even I."

"Bah!" ejaculated Bernière.

"Thanks!" said the American quickly.

M. de Bernière tried to explain his "bah."

"I meant to say——"

"Oh, don't explain, please," said Montgomery, with an amiable smile. "That surprises you, does it? Well, it astonishes me when I think I am the husband of the handsomest woman in the American colony. She is a beauty—a professional beauty!"

"Yes, a 'professionable beauty!' I know it," said the young man. "I have learned the American term from my English professor; but we need not translate it."

Mr. Montgomery smiled in accepting the little joke of the Parisian.

"I understand—yes. One who makes a profession of beauty. The term is misconstrued in Paris," he added, coldly, with a singular smile. "But they will not be deceived long. Mrs. Montgomery is very amiable—very amiable—away from home! The other day a writer, *Papillonne* of the *Figaro*, took the fancy to tell the story of our marriage. It is very poetic."

"Indeed?" said M. Bernière.

"Thanks again!" and Montgomery bowed slightly. Then seeing that the young man evidently wished to recall the unlucky exclamation, he said: "Oh, do not explain. She was divorced from her first husband."

"What! Mrs. Montgomery?"

"Yes; you have not read *Papillonne's* article. I am her second. She fell in love with me on account of my—well, on account of my name."

"Truly! Montgomery!" said M. de Bernière, pronouncing the historic name.

But Montgomery again interrupted:

"Oh, do not insist. There are two *m's* in the French name *Montgommery*, only one in mine. And that troubles Mrs. Montgomery not a little."

"You could have it made over; another *m* and a *de*—"

"I have thought of that, but it would be noticed."

"Oh!" replied the young man, laughing, "that is done every day."

"But Norton would laugh at me."

"Ah! yes, Mr. Norton. I am sorry my cousin de Solis is not here to talk about Mr. Norton. It is a long time since we have talked about Mr. Norton."

"You know him, then?" said Montgomery.

"Oh, a little! As we know foreigners in Paris."

"I saw you at his house at the last soiree he gave at the Park Monceau."

"That was the first time I went there. What a superb inauguration for a hotel! What luxury! What taste! The greenhouse especially was astonishing. A Parisian jewel seen by Edison electric lights! Only they don't speak French there. I saw Turks, Persians and Americans, but I looked in vain for Parisians. The most Parisian person I saw was a Japanese or a Javanese, I am not sure which. But, my dear Montgomery, there is another Norton, surely; he who has just bought a Meissonier for eight hundred thousand francs at Philadelphia."

"That is the false Norton."

"How the false Norton?"

"Just as I am a Montgomery with two *m*'s. The true Norton, my Norton, is Richard Hepworth Norton, the proprietor of the most famous copper mines in the United States, the rival of the boldest railroad contractors, the *rich* Norton, as he is called, to distinguish him from the *poor* Norton who has only twenty millions——"

"Oh! the unfortunate man."

"Of income," added Montgomery coldly.

"Then it is Richard Norton?" inquired Bernière.

"Yes, Richard Norton, the superlatively rich."

“That is true,” said the Parisian. “Rich is now used only in the positive degree. It is to be taken as the minimum. To have what is strictly necessary one must be——”

“A many millionaire, certainly. Our American society has invented the word. We are for the enormous, the excessive, the gigantic. We can not live, my dear sir, as you do in your old Europe, on a patch of worn out earth with the beggarly four cents a day which was enough for our fathers. He who is not too rich, nowadays, has not enough! He who has no indigestion, has not dined! Who is not madly in love, has not loved!”

“I understand,” said Bernière, opening his umbrella. “You do not like to live like a petty grocer.”

The American nodded his head with a sarcastic air:

“Oh! my dear sir, be careful, be careful! When you are with Americans, you must never treat with contempt a profession which, to your French prejudices, may be most ridiculous, because the minister from the United States, or the president himself, may have adorned it. He who speaks to you made his fortune over a grocer’s counter.”

“A Montgomery?”

“Yes; my wife would be delighted to forget it,

but I do not blush to be reminded of it, by any means."

"And you are right. But your associate, Mr. Norton, he surely did not buy this Norman mansion, with its magnificent collections, and his hotel in Paris, the wonder of his guests—he did not do all this with—prunes?"

"It may be that he did it all with prunes; I have not asked him," said Montgomery coldly. "Moreover we never inquire whence comes a great fortune, or a pretty woman. We salute the one and respect the other."

"Is it the woman whom you respect?" laughingly asked Bernière, who had risen, for the sun was becoming decidedly hot.

"Both," answered the American, "both."

"Even in the case of Miss Dickson?"

"Why do you speak of Miss Dickson?"

"Because everybody is talking about her. Ah! what a pretty creature she is! She will be capable of bringing back to Deauville all its ancient splendor. It is true, with Trouville on one side and Miss Dickson on the other, I will bet on Miss Dickson; she is superb. She would have been a fit subject for the painter's brush, as she appeared on horseback the

other day on the beach. An equestrian portrait of Carolus."

"Speaking of portraits, Monsieur de Bernière, can you recommend to me a painter, an artist of refined method, who would succeed in taking Mrs. Montgomery for the next exposition at the Salon?" asked the American.

"Who could paint Mrs. Montgomery's portrait?" repeated Bernière, and through his monocle he scanned the little fat man, who seemed all aglow with his question. He scanned him with a smile, in which there was a faint, a very faint tinge of irony. "Oh these husbands!" he thought.

"Who could take Mrs. Montgomery's portrait? Why my dear sir, there is an American artist who is very much in fashion, entirely in the fashion I might say, ever since his famous picture of a woman in the style of Whistler—the author of '*The Woman in Black*, Edward Harrison."

The calm, almost fatherly face of Montgomery suddenly took on an icy look.

"Harrison?" he said. "Impossible!"

"Why not?"

"Because he was my wife's first husband."

"Ah! bah!" said M. Bernière.

He wanted to add, "So much the better, he

knows her better than another." But this double-edged retort remained unspoken on his lips. He was only astonished that Mrs. Montgomery had not had the good taste to begin by choosing the present husband, thus arriving at Mr. Montgomery by the shortest cut. But after all a woman has the right to be deceived.

Montgomery must have divined his thought, for he said coldly:

"Divorce is made to remedy all that. Marriage without divorce is a prison."

"And with divorce you have a prison from which one may occasionally break out?"

"Nothing more nor less."

"Very well, my dear sir, I congratulate Mrs. Montgomery on having broken jail, and I congratulate you on having profited by her escape. Come, let us make a tour of the gaming tables."

"Willingly. I like to see them play."

"And the betting?"

"Oh," said the American, "I never play, never. Money lost at play is like bread thrown away. It is stealing from those who have not."

Bernière wondered, on hearing Montgomery express himself in this manner, whether the American was not uttering his axiom to produce an effect, to

give himself, as it were, a moral force. No, not at all; the rich tradesman was talking seriously, for he esteemed only a useful employment of money which had been honorably earned.

While walking slowly toward the Casino, along the wooden pavement, under a sun whose rays glinted upon the surface of the sea like jewels, the young man continued his questions.

"You will observe that I am not stingy," said Montgomery. "I can understand how we may throw money out of the windows, in the way of lavish expenditure, but it is absurd, in my opinion, to let the croupier rake it from the gaming table."

"Bah! Gaming is a sensation like any other. And there are so few—so few!"

"You think so? You are very happy, are you not?"

"Not at all; I am terribly bored."

"Then marry."

"Why?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the American, "to have children, if nothing else."

"Pooh! Life is so small a thing to give them. And then though one is sure to have a wife, he is not so sure to have children. You have none."

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Montgomery, laughing, "I have a wife who is also my spoiled child."

"We do not understand each other, dear sir," said Bernière, when they had reached the door of the Casino. "You are a man of action, I am a man of doubt."

"You are better than that—a deliquescent, a man who believes the worst of everything, a pessimist in short."

"As you will. We are all a little so in this end of the nineteenth century."

"All?"

"All who think."

"Who think only of themselves?"

"Dear Mr. Montgomery, I would like to know who are the people who think especially about others? Perhaps you will cite St. Vincent de Paul. He is dead."

"Are you not a relation of M. de Solis?"

"I am his cousin."

"Does he think only about himself, in going to Tonquin, to make observations on the climate of that devil of a country?"

"No."

"Is he always boasting of being a decadent, a pessimist?"

"No. But you are citing an exception. My

cousin is an exception—yes, a hero; and the exceptions confirm the rule.”

“Well, my dear sir, the ambition of every man who is not an imbecile is to be an exception. Ah! If I were young, and a Frenchman—”

“Well?”

“Well, nothing! The affairs of your country do not concern me. Let us go and see the gaming tables—enter! Enter, my dear sir.”

“After you, I pray.”

“No, after you.”

“Well, well,” said Bernière, taking the American’s arm. “My dear Mr. Montgomery, let us go in together.”

CHAPTER II.

“Take my card to Mr. Norton. If he is at home he will receive me.”

This order, given in a firm tone, in which, under a manner of polished politeness, there could be discerned the habit of command, caused the valet, to whom it was addressed, to regard the speaker with some curiosity. He was a young man, or rather a man still young, brown, slender, wearing a full beard trimmed to a point, and a closely fitting English walking coat. Some officer, doubtless, in citizen's dress, and without decoration in his button-hole.

The valets in the Norman villa of Mr. Richard Norton, accustomed to a host of people asking favors, who came to the house of the American like an incoming tide, saw only rarely French faces in the ante-chamber, and in the valet's response to the young man there was a very marked show of respect. He deposited the card upon a silver tray and said:

“If monsieur the marquis will give himself the trouble to wait a moment;” casting a quick glance at the card, he read the name *Marquis de Solis*, and

opening ceremoniously the door of a small parlor on the ground floor, just off the vestibule, he begged the marquis to be seated.

M. de Solis seated himself, much astonished to find such a ceremonial in this luxurious chalet, and looked about him. Pictures covered the walls of this little parlor which was furnished like a Trianon, in white and gold. The illustrious masters were here represented by admirable specimens in oil and water color. But these were evidently only a small sample of Richard Norton's collection, whose gallery in New York, as well as that in Paris, was celebrated.

While thus engaged, the marquis heard the valet calling some one through a speaking tube at the bottom of the staircase, to know if Mr. Norton, whose study was evidently on the first or second floor, overlooking the sea, was visible.

M. de Solis had hesitated in presenting himself to Mr. Norton. He dreaded to reopen a sealed past which was dear to him. He loved this Norton whom he had known in the new world, where the marquis had gone to study the American vines, in the hope that he might yet save what was still remaining of the fortune of his mother, the marchioness. Free, a bachelor, a traveler by predilection,

and for some years by a sort of physical and moral necessity, as if he felt the need of shaking off, in the feverish changes of locality, some haunting obsession. M. de Solis had found few men who were as sympathetic as Norton, and who, to tell the truth, were, like the American true men.

And by an ironical destiny, an accident had willed that Solis was to encounter in this universally respected man, in this friend whose memory he was carrying with him through life, the insolently happy being, born to snatch from him without realizing it, the only woman he had loved.

A whole romance, unfinished, voluntarily unfinished in the agony of his self-sacrifice, in a world of dreams, now ended and vanished, suddenly took shape and body for de Solis; when the doctor announced that Richard Norton and she who was now called Mrs. Norton were at Trouville.

Mrs. Norton! She used to bear another name when he met her four years before, at the home of her father, Mr. Harley, in New York, when in the talks of the young man and the young woman, in their spontaneous confidences becoming more and more intimate each day, he had gone almost to the length of avowing himself to Sylvia. Sylvia! The echo of that name was all that was left to him of

that past—of that growing love, the only true love he had ever felt in his life. And Sylvia herself—did it not seem that she loved him? Had she not said as much in her sweet, shy looks, in the slow, soft pressure of the hand, in the words which had fallen from that laughing and yet serious mouth?

How he had loved her! How he had admired her pride and a certain haughty calm she had! How well he remembered her eyes, clear as a wave traversed by the sunlight, as she fixed them upon him, as if to read his thoughts—those eyes which shone under her blond brows and yellow hair with a strange intensity! He had intended to make her his wife, with her consent, and if Mr. Harley, the banker, had been willing to give his daughter to a Frenchman. Of Sylvia, Georges de Solis was sure. He had only to declare himself. He was going to speak when an alarming despatch from Madame de Solis suddenly recalled him to France. The son had to return to fight off the fierce creditors from the family fortune.

Then the marquis returned to his country, struggled, and at last snatched from the grasp of the lawyers what his father, who had had a mania for speculation, had left his family. But this debris of a fortune, sufficient for his mother and himself, was

totally inadequate for the needs of the daughter of the banker Harley, and the marquis dared not utter the avowal which burned upon his lips. He waited, counting upon some fortunate chance, and time passed. No doubt Sylvia forgot, thinking herself forgotten; and the day that M. de Solis learned that Miss Harley had become the wife of another, he left his home and traveled all over the world to escape his own thoughts, to get away from his own suffering as a wounded animal flees from the hunter, hoping, by running, to shake off the pain of his wounds. But one only shakes off the drops of blood in such wild flights. The marquis had carried his sorrow about with him and exhausted his curiosity in long voyages, in learned missions, or in self-imposed sojournings in the extreme orient. He had spent his time, had worn out his life, but his sorrows were not yet healed. Forgetfulness had not yet cicatrised his wounds, and when the doctor had spoken of Norton the marquis turned very pale. He had a sensation as of a band tightly closing around his heart.

For it had happened, in order that the loss of Sylvia should be the more complete—it had happened, that the man who had made her his wife was, by the irony of fate, the being whom he had loved most

profoundly; one of those men who yields himself up to you, and to whom you yield yourself at the first glance, from the first grasp of the hand.

Solis could not remember that Norton had ever spoken to him of Miss Harley. And yet these men, bound together in so close an intimacy, had exchanged many confidences. Solis, recommended to Richard Norton by the representative of the United States at Paris, one of his old companions, had been the guest of Richard in some of the mining camps which the Frenchman wished to study; and their relations beginning thus by chance had been like iron hardened into steel by the action of fire—changed in the crucible of peril into a complete and devoted friendship.

Moreover, true sympathetic attractions can not be explained. If they had seen each other for the first time in a parlor, they would have been friends just the same, supposing that they could have talked together in full liberty as they did in those long days at the mines, when Norton explained and Solis listened. Ah! the marquis remembered it only too well. Norton had never let him suspect that he knew Miss Harley. He did not know her then perhaps. He must have met her afterward, become enamored of her, and demanded her hand. Well, he

would know all these details as soon as he should have a chance to talk with Norton. He was in a feverish haste to see him again.

To see him? or to see her? He dared not put to himself this question. But with that almost cruel faculty of intimate analysis, with which some souls are endowed, he felt that in his desire to see Norton there entered more of joy and, in his hope of finding Sylvia, more of dread.

He had, moreover, traversed the road leading to the villa Norton, mechanically, as by a sort of instinct, without any reflection. He found himself before the door, ready to ring; indeed he had already rung the bell, when he asked himself, if he had not better take the train to Paris, and quit Trouville without seeing this man who had been his friend and this woman whom he had silently, timidly adored.

He was still hesitating in this ante-chamber into which he had been introduced. He regretted that he had come, and was saying to himself that it would have been better for himself and her never to have reopened the past. The sound of a whistle traversed the ante-chamber like an order aboard ship, and the valet re-entered, asking "Monsieur the marquis" to follow him. De Solis, preceded by the servant,

mounted a stairway whose wooden baluster was richly carved and upon which were hung at intervals rare specimens of faience, in which the colors of the old Rouen pieces answered to the brownish tints of the plates in Mezzo—Arab.

On the second floor of the villa, as luxurious as a hotel on the Champs-Elyseès, Georges de Solis was confronted by a lackey, who ceremoniously opened the door of a vast working-room and study, whose windows looked out upon the sea. At the door he was met by a tall, bearded, smiling man, who, with hand outstretched, welcomed him in a stentorian voice, with a decidedly Yankee accent.

“Well! what a piece of luck!” Norton’s voice sounded clear as a trumpet note.

“Shake hands, old fellow, sit down. What good wind has blown you here?”

The two men looked at each other a moment with that instinctive curiosity common to people, who, while questioning each other with the eyes, leap over the years which have passed since they last met. Georges de Solis forgot for a moment every other thought, and felt only a true pleasure in finding his friend Norton just as he had left him—a man, solid as if built of masonry, a large frame, with the shoulders of a caryatid and the wrists of a

wrestler. The brow, indicative of great will power, whose bony structure showed under the skin like carved stone, was shaded by hair of a reddish color beginning to turn gray at the temples; the mouth, energetic and frank; the long beard depending from the chin; the ears standing out from the head; the dress a little puritanical in style—a long coat closely buttoned over the great solid torso. Nothing in the appearance of the American had suffered change.

In his turn Norton scanned the face of the marquis, with his grey eyes half hidden under his bristling brows, and said gaily:

“You are just the same!”

“Oh! no! I have more brown in my complexion and fewer hairs on my head. My travels—”

“And where do you come from?”

“From almost anywhere. From the devil!”

“I went to see you as soon as I arrived in Paris. Nobody at home! Your mother was in the country, and you—”

“In Indo—China; but to-day, my mother, whom I found at Solis on my return, and myself have left Landes and I am trying to give the loved one some sea air and a little health. I might have gone to Biarritz, which is nearer Dax, but I chose to remain nearer Paris, where there are always chances

to sell and buy, to endeavor to sell one of my estates which will not bring as much as it cost. After that it is my intention to go to Solis and bury myself with my mother."

"You will do me the honor to present me to her?" said Norton.

"With pleasure. She adores you, you know. She has made me tell her a hundred times, how you saved me from being burned alive the day your oil well took fire. I have often thought of that adventure. The first thing I remember after my rescue, half suffocated, was seeing you with your hair burned off, as if your head had been shaved, and your whiskers singed to a cinder."

"You see they have grown again," said Norton laughing. "But do not speak of that time, dear Georges. If there is any one who, on that day saved the life of another, as they say in romances, it was you. Yes, you! It is true that I extricated you from the furnace into which a single false step would have made you fall, but you had come to warn me of my danger, my dear friend, and without your intervention I would have been buried beneath the heavy timbers and reduced to a cinder into the bargain. If you tell the stories of your travels to your mother in this way, she will only know the half. You are

too modest. I will have to interfere to make her know the truth.

“Ah! well! Be it so,” said the marquis smiling. “We rendered each other a service, to save our lives. Let us divide the credit and say no more about it. Besides, the event is old. Five years ago! And do you know, Norton, I can say to you what you just now said to me, and with more truth: You have not changed—yes, you have grown younger.”

“When we have passed beyond the forties, we should become more spirituelle, and then we ought to get younger. Oh! I am not the species of trapper you knew, living the life of a workman among laborers as I did over yonder. I—am, what shall I say—softened, refined, more effeminate, perhaps, to please the dear woman whom I have married.”

Richard Norton had put into these few words an instinctive tenderness, and Solis much moved, yet entirely master of himself, and trying not to appear indifferent—interested on the contrary, as a friend should be in the happiness of a friend—de Solis felt that this man experienced a sort of violent need of speaking of the adored one.

“It is true, then, that you are married?” said the marquis.

“And to the best of creatures. How much I

regret that Mrs. Norton is out; she will be so happy to see you again."

"Ah!" said the young man, "Mrs. Norton does me the honor to remember me?"

"Remember you, my dear! Why we often speak of you, very often."

De Solis tried to find some compliment, some form of thanks. He could think of nothing to say. Strange! what Norton had just said, instead of being agreeable, caused him suffering. She talked of him! He on the contrary kept her name in his memory, as in a sanctuary. He thought of her again and again and constantly, and never spoke of her to any one. And she spoke of him, indifferent no doubt, consoled, happy! This memory which Sylvia had of him now, tortured him more even than silence and forgetfulness would have done.

"She is the most charming of women," added Norton; "but she is not at all well."

"Ah!" said M. de Solis.

"Yes; it is because of her health that I have decided to establish myself in Paris. Dr. Fargeas works miracles when it comes to nervous disorders; Sylvia suffers from something of that character. Yes; she has inherited from her mother, the daughter of a Virginian, a great sportsman and especially a

high liver and hard drinker, and who died at last of gout—she has inherited from her mother an arthritic tendency. And if the maternal heredity had ended there, all would be well; but she communicated to her daughter an extreme, an unhealthy sensitiveness. The climate of New York, with its extremes of torrid heat and glacial cold, was not suited to her. One or two winters in Florida were not sufficient to restore her to health. And now I believe only in Dr. Fargeas. I have for Sylvia the superstition of Fargeas.”

Instinctively Georges de Solis closed his eyes. That name, Sylvia, pronounced in his presence, for the first time in years, had a singular impression upon him. He saluted it with his eyelids, as a soldier ducks his head at the whistling of the first ball.

Norton continued his confidences, speaking of Sylvia with the overflowing effusion of a man who really loves. Then he stopped, saying with deep emotion:

“You see what a thing friendship is! You have hardly been here five minutes, my dear Solis, and I am telling you quite naturally what I should say to no one; what I only vaguely confess to myself. Let us speak no more of that. Let us talk about yourself.”

They were sitting face to face before the window, near a table, upon which, under paper weights, were piled dispatches, letters, pamphlets, ranged methodically annotated and pinned together.

"Have a cigar?" asked Norton.

"Thank you; you know that I do not smoke."

"That is true. Well, what became of you for so long a time?"

Solis shook his head. "What has become of me? Nothing; I have traveled for recreation, going to Anam as I went to the United States and as I should have lounged on the boulevard."

"But with more profit to science; however, I read in the *Revue* an article on the colonization of the extreme East, which seemed to me to be very practical."

"And it was not necessary to go so far to write it. One can learn more at Paris even about remote countries than anywhere else. I have found friends at the club who knew as much as I, I assure you, of what I had seen at Tonquin. The telegraph tells them in ten lines and in two minutes what it took me two months to discover. And then the travel. It is very nice when you do not go, loaded with worry—memories—like so much baggage."

"Memories—your mother?"

“Ah! the dear saint!” said M. de Solis. “Her memory gave me courage. But there were others. But they are forgotten I hope—yes, left along the route, lost on the road, with my burnt powder and empty cartridges. I have come back with the fixed resolution of finishing with adventures and of growing old by my fireside, happy, like you—married, like you.”

“Happy!” exclaimed Norton, nodding his head.

“Come!” and the marquis tried to smile, after he had forced himself to choke down the memories which rose to his heart. “Come, Norton, do you know a young woman who wants a good fellow, a little saddened, but not morose; disenchanted on many points, not a pessimist, according to the present fashion? My cousin Bernière takes charge of that specialty, retaining faith enough, passion enough if need were, to commit some folly, and even to resign himself to a virtuous wisdom. My mother does not wish me to become a confirmed old bachelor. I ought to marry, I suppose. After all, the voyage to the chimney corner is the only one I have not made. Very well, it is agreed. I have some fear of marriage, as we fear lest the water be cold for a bath. But I have decided to swim. Have you any one who can teach me to swim, Norton?”

The American did not take his eyes from the marquis while the latter was speaking, for he saw that Solis concealed under this fictitious gayety some melancholy irony, some vague suffering, the resolution of a man who has a thirst for something new, because he wishes to forget the past.

"Then to marry is for you to jump into the water. Well, that is complimentary to your swimming teacher," said Norton. "Seriously, I do not know any one worthy of you. If I should see a remarkable young girl among our Americans—"

"Oh! no, not an American!" said Solis quickly.

"Why not?"

"I shall never marry an American."

"Why not?"

"Because I think that in marriage there is friction enough arising from difference in temperaments, without adding those which would come from a difference in race."

The manner of the marquis was so serious that Richard Norton could not help smiling.

"If my country women were to hear you they would want to tear your eyes out. They are pretty, exquisite, serious, and under an eccentric exterior are capable of the utmost devotion."

"I know that very well," said Solis. "Moreover,

if you want to marry I cannot understand, I confess, why you should want to do it at hazard and as if it were a mere lottery."

"It matters not, since it is a matter of business," said the marquis, his lips curved in an aggressive smile. The grey eyes of Norton never left him, as if the American was determined to divine the secret of this sadness which did not exist formerly in the spirit of Solis.

"Business! business! I am certain, however, my dear Georges, that you do not care for the dowry your wife may bring you."

"No, absolutely!"

"Especially as the custom of dowry is unknown in America, which takes away from the question of marriage that odor of money which is so noticeable in your France. You must confess that for a nation of shop-keepers, this contempt of bank-notes has a certain nobleness."

Solis did not reply for a moment. He was absorbed in the contemplation of a strange looking clock on the mantelpiece, whose pendulum consisted of a steel pestle. "I was not dreaming," he said, "of criticising in the remotest degree, either your manners or your young ladies, when I said I should never marry an American girl—any more than I

intended to speak of a bargain when I pronounced that detestable word 'business.' I only say that when one has not married the woman he loves, he might as well leave to chance the care of making himself love the person whom he shall marry."

"Well, upon my word! That is a fine theory," said Norton, laughing.

"It is no theory; it is one of the thousand necessities to which life, such as we find it, reduces us. You have—you——" and the marquis spoke slowly, pronouncing his words one at a time, like a man walking with precaution upon the thinly frozen surface of some pond—"you have the happy fortune, without doubt, to have married for love."

He affected to look at the sea, which showed in the distance through the open window, but his eyes were furtively watching Norton's face.

"I adore the girl whose hand I asked in marriage," gravely answered the American.

Solis replied in a louder voice:

"I loved an exquisite woman and I never dared to tell her I loved her."

"And I repeat, why not?"

"You were rich, very rich, and you could offer, along with your fortune, your name to whomsoever you pleased."

“Certainly.”

“I was poor, compared to this young girl, and I could not, I dared not ask her to partake of an existence which would have seemed meager to her compared with that which she had led, up to that time, in her father’s house. My love called loudly upon me to speak, but my pride bade me be silent.”

“It is a pity this young woman was not a Yankee. You would not have been embarrassed in that case. I know a young girl whose father has five hundred thousand dollars a year income, who married a Tennessee preacher, whose only fortune was his Bible and saddle-bags. She is very happy. Bah! my dear Georges, a woman consoles for a woman. There is a Spanish proverb which says: ‘The juice of the mulberry will take out the mulberry stain.’ You will see at my house at the Parc Monceau, American women of all styles, brunettes, blondes, auburn-haired, delicious, intoxicating, charming; and it may be, in spite of your objections to the race, that one of them may efface the image of your country woman.”

“Perhaps,” answered M. de Solis.

Then, still looking at the clock, which was a true work of art, he added:

“I do not think so.”

The American shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh! we never believe such things until the day we discover that next to the rapidity with which we forget those living, who have disappeared from our lives, is the rapidity with which we forget sentiments which we thought were eternal. And we must live. Forward, always forward, is our national device, and it is my private motto. I do not spend my life in maundering over sentimental phantoms.”

M. de Solis was looking about him while Norton was speaking, and he felt—in finding himself there at Trouville in the cabinet of the American, so similar to a New York office—the sensation of a voyage, the impression of something exotic. Norton had brought his private mark, the stamp of his personal tastes even, to this house on the coast of Normandy. This atelier, in the Norman villa, had indeed a special character. In the midst of the luxurious and fanciful structure, and of these specimens of bric-a-brac which reminded one of the Hotel rue Rembrandt, this room with its severe aspect—enlivened only by the glimpse of the sea, caught through the open window—this great working room resembled the shop of an artisan. There were some pictures, but not many. By the side of a *Cavalier* by Velasquez, there was a water color, in which upon

an unnaturally blue sea there was represented a yacht bearing the name *Sylvia*. The picture was signed by an American artist. Side by side with this picture, their frames almost touching, was another, a landscape, where, in the shadow of some gigantic pines, some of which were hewed down and already cut into lengths, stood a pioneer cabin, from whose chimney softly curled a thin column of blue smoke, light as the sigh of an idyl. It was the home of the elder Norton, Richard's father. The cabin, where so often the old man had, in the evening, by the light of an oil lamp, read his Bible to his five children, seated around a table on which was spread the frugal meal, and where, against the wall, stood the glittering axe of this woodcutter. It was a picture which Richard carried wherever he went, hanging it over his head, as the Russian peasant hangs the holy icon in his isba. Norton's whole life was bound up in these two pictures. The log hut was the symbol of the family. The elder Norton was lying now beneath a marble monument bearing his name, a name as glorious as that of the founder of a dynasty—Abraham Norton. The first brought to his mind the father, the mother, with her happy smile; the sisters, now married; and the two brothers, both killed during the war of seces-

sion, fighting under the starry flag. The yacht represented his present life, the profound love of an existence, the only love, the recompense of a life of toil, the adored wife, the dear Sylvia.

Below these pictures were some small ebony book-cases, bringing within easy reach of the owner's hand a small but select collection of books, treatises on physics, chemistry or morals, that chemistry of the soul. On an etagère were some minerals labeled in red ink, gold ore, or specimens of coal. There was the model of a locomotive, a jewel of mechanism, by the side of a telephone. Then on the mantel, like the seal of the Americanism of the master, the characteristic clock, already mentioned, whose pendulum was a steel pestle, rising and falling with the regularity of a chronometer, and whose every movement marked a second, as if Norton preferred the time thus hammered out of eternity by his utilitarian clock, to the light tic-tac of the European time-piece.

This clock, which M. de Solis was staring at, seemed to say in its American diction, "*Go ahead, go ahead!*" and its pestle of steel, from whose burnished surface the rays of light were reflected, seemed to pound and crush what Richard Norton called the "phantoms of sentiment."

“What you say does not surprise me,” said the marquis. “Your fashion of looking at life is well represented in your clock there. It does not mark the lapse of time; it crushes it. The people of Holland, who were, however, very practical, gave to their clocks a character of poetry which suggested the dream world, the fantastic. They showed boats oscillating at each second; wind-mills turning their long arms, and then disappearing from minute to minute; fishermen drawing in some silvered fish, and the moon, the pale moon rising upon chimerical, and almost Chinese landscapes, as can be seen at Saardam. But these landscapes and these wind-mills were for the poor people shut up in their huts by the frozen Zuyder Zee, a window open upon the ideal, and, in the smoke of their pipes they saw again their past lives, their travels, while the tic-tac of the pendulum, sounding regularly, soothed them in their silent reveries like a healthful sleep. You make of your pendulums mortar pestles, or mechanical wheels. And in looking at that pestle which rises and falls, and rises again to fall again forever, I instinctively think of all that is suppressed, debased and crushed in modern life. It seems to me that we should idealize these clocks, these markers

of fleeting time, as tombs are decorated, the better to mask death with poetry and flowers."

"And I," said Norton, "think, and I repeat to you, that we should show life, and celebrate it as it is, with its truths, its asperities, its pestles of all sorts, that we may breast it, conquer it and make it lovable.'

The marquis, still seated, looked for a moment at this man carved from heart of oak, and who stood there, his large hands resting on the mantel, contemplating him with an expression at once joyous and full of defiance—defiance of fate.

"Come," said M. de Solis. "I see that if you have so strong a bias against sentiment, it is because you have found the reality of happiness."

"I confess that I should be an ingrate to complain, and yet—"

"And yet!" repeated Solis.

A melancholy shadow darkened the hard, osseous brow of Norton, as he said:

"My poor friend, everybody has his sorrows and anxieties. I was alluding to my own a moment ago. I have found, I, who have not and never had the air of a hero of romance, an ideal creature, and at the same time the best of wives. I married a young woman—you have seen little of her, but you know

her, a choice soul, superior in every way. I love her from the bottom of my heart. I would give in a lump all I possess only to see her smile, and I would go to work afterward, valiantly, to gain for her some new luxury. Well, my dear, all this happiness, all this semblance of perfect felicity, which, certainly for the people who do not know me, for the beggars, the adventurers, the indifferent, the counsellors, the reporters who speak until I am irritated, of the *Millionaire Norton*—Richard smiled—“all this apparent enjoyment, which, for the Parisians, makes of me a privileged person to be envied from all points of view; all this, Solis, even this chance for which I thank fate, does not change the brutal truth. I am unhappy; I am sad, and at the bottom—at the very bottom of my soul— Shall I make a full breast of it, in spite of my love of strife and of work, and of all that makes up life, the true life, the useful, robust, generous life? Well, my dear, I am not happy.”

“Not happy!”

“Yes, it seems to me, if I may say so, that all this happiness hangs as it were by a thread. I have all the terrors of the superstitious. Rather romantic eh? for your friend Norton, for a Yankee, and in spite of that utilitarian pendulum which displeases

you so much. There is romance everywhere, my good Solis, as my experience proves. Would to God that my anxiety were only a romance. But no, Sylvia is ill."

"Sylvia," repeated the marquis, giving to the name an expression of singular emotion, which Norton did not seem to notice.

"She is ill, I have said, either from an affection of the heart or of the nerves; who knows? It is a nervous affection, some trouble in the circulation of the blood, a menace of embolism—to use the diagnosis of Dr. Fargeas—a shrinking of the mitral valve; that is the scientific term, and it is that which poisons the joy I have in feeling myself master of my life, recompensed for my labor, rich and free, but with a menace before me, an obstacle, a wall—yes, as if it were the wall of a cemetery."

Now, Solis passed through a new phase of experience, and a cruel satisfaction entered his heart while he silently listened to Richard Norton, confiding to him his sorrows and doubts. Yes, little by little the American allowed his innermost thoughts to be read, his life to be penetrated; and in this intimate talk with his friend, he mechanically told how his marriage with Miss Harley had come about. A dozen times Georges was on the point of stopping

this flow of confidence, but he felt a bitter consolation in knowing, in learning from the lips of the husband himself that there was even from the morrow of this union a deception and resultant suffering.

"I had often met at her father's," said Norton, "the young girl whom I was afterward to marry. She was sad, pensive and very serious. It was by these characteristics she won me. I am neither pensive nor melancholy. Contraries attract. Like you, however, I hesitated to declare myself, not because of my fortune, heavens, no! but because of her intelligence and beauty, of that grace which did not seem made to be touched by my rude wood-chopper's hands. Then, one day finding her more melancholy than usual, I felt myself more moved and more eloquent, without intending it—I asked her if she would not confide her sorrow—for she had one—to one who would share it, I told her that I asked nothing in the world except to devote myself to her. It appears she divined that I was not lying. Her father was my advocate. He pleaded my cause and gained it. And so we were married."

"A love marriage," said Solis, taking a malicious pleasure in thrusting the steel into his friend's heart.

"Love on the one side and friendship on the

other," answered Norton, whom the question rendered serious.

"But on both sides a confidence the most complete, the most profound. Perhaps on her part there was haste to marry, not to hesitate any longer—who knows? To forget perhaps," he added, as if to himself. "But," and his voice became firmer, "we are accustomed to rapid unions and decisions, and the family relation with us is not the worse for it. Besides, a word spoken from the heart before a minister of the Gospel, who blesses two souls in the name of God—even in the coldness and informality of this ceremony, there is a gravity and simplicity which have a character of grandeur, and which please me——"

"And where is the poetry of it?" asked Solis, pointing to the pendulum.

"Oh! poetry is everywhere, where there is true love. When she whom I loved was given me I was mad with joy, drunken with hope. I was happy. My dear, happiness is poetry."

"Perhaps it is, indeed, the best kind," said the marquis, who had become very pale. "And afterward?"

"Afterward?" Norton hesitated a moment. "Afterward? Ah! human idyls do not last long.

The first trial for my young wife was the death of her father. He was ruined, poor man, before I knew that he was embarrassed in his business; he had so much pride in his commercial honor—and before I could come to his assistance.”

“Why did you not learn of the condition of his business at the moment of your marriage—from the contract?”

“The contract! What contract?” and Norton laughed. “Oh! we have no such discussions before a notary of lovers’ interests as you have. The American marries the woman he loves without examining the code, and undertakes to make her happy without having a civil officer impose upon him the obligation to do so, in a treatise as complicated as a legal process. She brings him for dowry her beauty, he for dowry his courage. They commend themselves to God and begin life’s journey. Their parents have toiled, amassed and grown old. It is not the time to demand an account of their fortune and to diminish it. They can pass their last days, the dear loved ones, without depriving themselves of anything, living on what they have hardly and honestly gained. If they can still enjoy their fortune, so much the better for them. They have conquered, and may consume it if they like. It is their business.

My wife was no more interested in knowing whether her father would leave her a dollar than I was in calculating what inheritance I might claim, one day or other. And this is our frightful Yankee mercantile spirit, the worship of the dollar, of which so much has been said. Whatever it was—whether this catastrophe has saddened my wife, or whether some other grief lies concealed in her heart—since then the health of Mrs. Norton has troubled me, and I am more anxious to know what Dr. Fargeas thinks of her condition than to know the quotations of my oil stocks in New York and Chicago.”

“And,” asked Solis, perhaps to give the conversation a more cheerful turn, “you continue to manage from your Paris office those large movements which must demand a constant surveillance?”

Norton again smiled, his strong sound teeth showing through his yellow beard. “Oh, fear nothing, my dear Solis, a Yankee will lose nothing of his rights. The trans-Atlantic cable keeps me as well informed of my business, here in the Hotel rue Rembrandt, or in this villa of Normandy, as if I were seated in in my New York office. I am an American of Paris, but to day there is no longer any Paris or America; or rather, to flatter your chauvinism, the universe is only a suburb of Paris, and you

prove it when you return from Anam, as one used to come back from Saint-Cloud or Bougival."

"And I am enchanted to find you here, and to warm my heart by the fires of your courage, my dear Norton, but—" and his voice, which he tried to render firm, trembled a little—"sorry to know that you are not entirely happy."

"Bah!" said Norton, "if you know perfect happiness, tell me where the fabulous bird has made its nest; I would have that nest mounted in topazes. But above all, not a word of this to Mrs. Norton when you see her."

"Not a word, I promise you." The American, while talking, had touched the ivory button of an electric bell.

"See if Mrs. Norton has returned," he said to a valet who had promptly appeared, and who bent his head in response.

Solis was standing, looking at Norton whose tall form showed against the horizon. The sky was clear, and the long roll of the breakers could be heard from the distant beach.

He was asking himself why he had come, and if he ought not even now to fly, never to return. In a few moments he would see Sylvia again. The lackey, whose steps still resounded in the ante-

chamber, had gone to advise Mrs. Norton of his presence. He was about to appear before her—and at this interview, after so many years, her husband would be present. It would take place immediately perhaps.

A silence fell between these two who had just felt so much pleasure in meeting again, and the conversation, a moment ago so intimate and full of confidences, ran upon commonplaces, as if, suddenly, these friends had nothing more to say to each other.

“Ah, my dear Solis, will you be good enough to be present this evening at a little concert given by Mrs. Norton? You will see the handsome Miss Dickson and Miss Offenburger, who is also adorable. Oh! we have very good music, I assure you. All Americans do not play Mozart as if their hands were a pair of tongs. My wife is an excellent musician, and the program is very select. I know very well that you would not come for the program. Would madame, your mother, do us the favor to accompany you? I ask pardon for the suddenness of this invitation, but my excuse must be that I did not know you were in Trouville.”

“I shall be charmed to come this evening, though I am a little uncivilized,” said the marquis. “As to my mother, do not count on her. She does not like

a crowd. And I am not sure that she will pardon you for taking her son from her for one evening."

"At seven o'clock then? my dear Solis."

"No, I shall not be able to dine with you. I will come later; I have promised the dear mother to be absent from her as little as possible, for the first month after my return, and I dine alone with her. Yes, we sit there opposite each other like two lovers."

"And you are right. Perhaps it is this love only which never is deceived. I shall do myself the honor to visit your mother to-morrow, and I shall thank her for having allowed you to come to us for a little while this evening."

The marquis felt in the accent which Norton placed upon these words, a more cruel bitterness than he had manifested in his previous conversation, and with his clear eyes he studied his friend to read if possible his sorrowful thought.

But the domestic was knocking at the door, and at a word from Norton he entered.

"Madame?" asked the American.

"Madame is still absent. Miss Meredith came in just now alone."

"Very well," said Richard, with that sudden and masculine gayety which contrasted sharply with his

rare moments of melancholy. "My dear Solis, you will at least see my niece."

And the domestic having retired:

"Ah! my dear, you talk of marriage. The young girl you have dreamed of, my friend, your ideal, good as gold, loyal as her word, is my niece. If she were not an American she would be exactly what you want."

Norton was about to go on. He stopped. A voice, clear, joyous, a soft caressing voice, a voice with a pure French accent, was saying at the door:

"Am I indiscreet?"

And Solis saw standing there, as if afraid to enter, a tall young woman, elegant and slenderly built whose black, sparkling eyes, illuminating a fine but rather pale face, struck him at once. She wore a gray gown and a light wrap, which, slipping from her shoulders, enveloped her slender waist like a girdle. Upon her brown hair, which curled lightly, was placed a little hat, almost severely simple, but coquettishly worn. There was, in this fine being, in this dress, in the pretty smile, in the little hands encased in Suédish gloves, something which betokened a girl of breeding, softened, however, by a certain insouciance of manner—the gay frankness of the

grisette mingled with the haughty bearing of the patrician.

Miss Meredith, on a gesture of Norton, stepped forward and saluted M. de Solis and waited until her uncle should present the marquis. Then at the name of Solis, she responded with a gracious word without any false timidity. She knew the marquis very well.

“My uncle Richard has often spoken of you, sir. I did not have the pleasure of seeing you in America. I am charmed, knowing you to be one of my uncle’s best friends, to be able to do so in France.”

It was in all its artless simplicity, and without formality, the welcome of a hostess receiving a friend, and the young girl seemed to be a woman putting a guest at his ease. Solis was accustomed to this exōtic freedom of manner, which yet appeared to him a little unexpected and bizarre in France. But from this young and loyal being there beamed a particular charm, the seduction of the eyes without sadness, of the lips without bitterness, of the smile without irony, of this beautiful girl of twenty years.

“Did you leave Sylvia walking?”

“No, uncle; I left her at the Princess de Louverchal’s. Madame Louverchal has an auction at her

villa for the benefit of the fishermen ruined by the storm in January. Sylvia is emptying her boxes and drawers. If she does not send all these playthings, albums and tapestries to the poor, she will fill the house with them, I warn you."

"Oh! I am not worried," said Norton. "She will send them to the poor."

M. de Solis had taken his hat and was making a hasty bow, before taking his leave.

"What! Are you going?" said Norton.

"I hope I am not chasing you away," said Miss Meredith, smiling.

"Oh, no, miss. But though I am rustivating here, I have some matters which need my attention—a report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a communication on the establishments at Hanoi. And then I must not waste Mr. Norton's time; it is precious, even at Trouville."

"And never so well employed as when I am devoting it to you, my dear Georges. We shall see you this evening, shall we not? It is a promise?"

"With pleasure," said the marquis, though this assent cost him an effort.

He took Norton's extended hand, that hard, bony hand, whose palm showed more than one callous; saluted Miss Meredith, and left, accompanied by

Richard, who, with one hand laid lightly upon his shoulder, guided him with the familiar gesture of an elder caressingly leading a younger brother.

"Well, Eva," asked Norton, when he re-entered, "how do you like the marquis?"

The young girl was now, with her pretty ungloved fingers, setting her watch by the famous clock of the pestle pendulum.

"How do I like him?"

"Yes."

"Oh! well."

"Very well?"

"Very well, if you like."

"A true nobleman!"

"Yes, and a gentleman."

"Well," said Norton laughing, "you see this charming young man, estimable, distinguished, worthy and intellectual, has just promised me that he will never, never marry an American girl."

Miss Meredith had put her watch in its fob. She looked at her uncle a moment, and then bursting into a ringing laugh, the laugh of free-hearted youth, she said, "Truly? He has promised that? Well, then, he is a fool."

CHAPTER III.

The dinner at Norton's had long been finished, and Miss Eva was pouring the tea. With her handsome, finely formed hands she was passing the Sevres cups to her uncle's guests, while, surrounded by a group comprising M. de Berniere, Dr. Fargeas and a stout man, already becoming gray, and who was laughing a good deal, Miss Arabella Dickson was flirting at the same time with the music and with her attendant cavaliers. Norton was smoking a cigar and looking at the sea while talking with an immense personage as tall as a poplar. This was Colonel Dickson, the distinguished father of the fair Arabella. He was so tall, with his pointed head, long reddish colored beard, streaked with gray, streaming, as it were, from a high white collar, of a military stiffness; he was so long, so slender, that, seeing the smoke of a cigar issuing from the upper termination of his body, one might take him, in the obscurity, for the chimney of some factory in active eruption. His wife, Mrs. Colonel Dickson, enormous and fat, spread out upon a lounge, was flavoring the tea which Miss Meredith had brought her,

with some cognac, and was watching, with her big, dreamy blue eyes, the group, formed yonder under the immense shade of a lamp. This group was composed of her Arabella, surrounded by gentlemen in evening dress, among whom was that young Bernière, who, they said, was an eligible match.

In a corner of the parlor, opening upon a horizon spangled with stars, and upon a long line of golden points, seen at a distance, in the clear night and which were the lights of Havre—in the angle of the room, under some large tropical plants, with fan-shaped foliage green and fresh, Sylvia was talking with Mrs. Montgomery, while a pretty girl, young, brunette with the features and the beautiful golden red complexion of a Jewess, was turning the leaves of an album and talking medicine with Dr. Fargeas, who appeared to be astonished at her erudition.

“That Mademoiselle Offenburger is pretty,” Liliane Montgomery had just remarked to Mrs. Norton.

“Very pretty.”

“And so learned! oh! so learned! She is putting the doctor through a baccalaureate examination!”

Mrs. Colonel Dickson, who kept staring at her daughter and Mademoiselle Offenburger by turns, stopped occasionally to stir her tea with a quick

nervous motion. With her mother's instinct, she felt that the daughter of the banker, the fat Mr. Offenburger who was laughing his guttural laugh while bending over Miss Arabella's music—yes, she felt that this pretty little German Jewess was setting her cap for M. de Bernière, who, for the moment, did not seem to be paying any attention to her.

Bernière was a handsome fellow, amiable, witty, and above all a viscount! What a husband he would be for Arabella! He was one of the two or three hundred possible candidates whom the beautiful American had already encountered on the beach. He pleased Mrs. Dickson particularly, because he was a pessimist, and she, having experienced deceptions, also found that life was bitter, very bitter. That may have been why she liked her tea so very sweet that she took it in the shape of sweetened brandy.

It was not the first time that the colonel's wife had noticed Mademoiselle Offenburger's sly glances at M. de Bernière. Certainly the young viscount was not displeasing to the pretty Jewess, and as to Bernière himself—but Mrs. Dickson counted on Arabella's fine shoulders, most admirable shoulders for a girl of twenty.

Besides, in comparing Arabella with Made-

moiselle Offenburger, Mrs. Dickson was not troubled. Standing under the lamp near the doctor, Hélienè Offenburger was exquisitely pretty with her large, soft dark eyes, veiled with lashes like silken lace, her ripe, red lips, her Arab profile, her small, pink shell-like ears, showing under heavy bands of raven hair; but Arabella, sitting at the piano, tall, superb, a head like that of a Greek statue poised upon shoulders of a whiteness so dazzling that the light of the candles scarcely added a faint roseate glow—this admirable Arabella, crowned with a wealth of golden, silky hair, was simply irresistible.

Yes, the insolent beauty of Arabella, her perfect health, her magnificent force, cast the pretty Jewess into the shade as soon as one looked at her, so dumpy, insignificant and swarthy did the latter appear in comparison with that block of living marble.

As to Eva, the colonel's wife did not take her into consideration. Miss Meredith came and went, light as a bird, laughing, leaving the sofa where Sylvia and Liliane were talking, going to the piano where Arabella was alternating between operatic airs and American ballads, to the window where Norton was smoking with the colonel, always the gay, cheerful girl, casting here and there a sparkle of wit or a burst of gaiety. Indeed! This brunette

Miss Eva, slender and shapely, mocking, mirth provoking, could not, according to the difficult standard which Mrs. Dickson had set up for herself, enter the lists with Mademoiselle Offenburger and Arabella. To the colonel's wife she seemed a mere figurante in this parlor, where Miss Dickson was evidently playing the leading role. And besides, Mrs. Dickson attached much importance to the fact that M. de Bernière was giving Miss Eva no notice—no notice at all.

Of course, with the colonel's wife, married women did not count, any more than Eva did, or than married men. She might, however, have admired the two women who were talking opposite her—Sylvia Norton and Mrs. Montgomery. The light of a side lamp, placed above Liliane, cast a pearly lustre upon her bare arms, round and youthful looking, and submerged in a silken sheen the pale shoulders, the white neck, and the head with its mass of reddish blond hair, caught back in a single coil. She was a sort of second edition of Arabella. She had the same insolent beauty, with more embonpoint, a more specific vitality, something more mature and attractive. "Snow which does not suggest the sensation of cold," M. de Bernière had said of her one evening.

And by the side of Liliane Montgomery sat Syl-

via Norton—refined, fragile, a sort of a New York Parisienne—seductive in a certain saddened charm, a melancholy sweetness; in the vague tenderness of her eyes, which seemed to be looking far away in the direction of the coast, at the lights of Havre and the sky. She was charming, with her air of suffering. She was beautiful in her black costume of satin, whose sombre hue set off the striking fairness of her virgin-like face and of her languid looking hands. She seemed to those who saw her in her tender dignity to wear mourning for something disappeared, broken, vanished.

These two women, of character so different, were very fond of each other, perhaps because the contrast in their natures had, from the first day of their acquaintance, drawn them together.

Liliane was the only person in France whom Mrs. Norton could call friend. In their common memories they again saw themselves playing together as children in New York; exchanging vows of love and constancy as young girls, and when separated for life—Liliane having married an artist, and Sylvia Harley having become the wife of Richard Norton—the two friends had followed the hazards of a new life, and confidential letters had taken the place of the old time spoken confidences.

Then had come long silences, growing out of a more complete separation, for Liliane had gone to Europe with her first husband, and Sylvia had remained in the United States with Norton. There had been a forced cessation of the relations of friendship between them, for Sylvia allowed the days to succeed each other in the absolute calm of inaction, while Liliane was carried like thistle-down upon the wind of every caprice, enchanted with the active and super-excited life of the women of fashion, whom she encountered in the gay capital; barely stopping long enough in Paris to attend the opening of the Salon, or the races, and then off the next day for Dinard, returning only to take the first sleeper for Menton or Pau.

For her first husband, the artist Harrison, Lilian—she had Gallicized her name and now signed it *Liliane*—cared nothing; she never spoke of him and tried to felicitate herself upon having been divorced from him, and upon bearing the name of her second husband, Montgomery, which gave her the illusion of being distinguished by one of the greatest names of France. This name, of whose better authenticity she would have been glad, she paraded at the Tuesdays of the Comedie Francaise, at Canterets, at Biarritz, at the flower festivals at Nice, under the

gay showers of Italian *coufetti*, that snow of the Carnival. She had just returned from her winter quarters, when Mr. Montgomery, her husband, announced that Mr. and Mrs. Norton had installed themselves in the hotel built by the sugar-refiner Bonivet. It had been sold to the Duchesse d'Escard and finally bought for three million francs net by Richard Norton, who had straightway put into it works of art worth four or five millions more. Montgomery, on more than one occasion, had been the associate of Norton, and so it happened that affection united the women whose husbands were allied by interest and esteem.

Upon her return to Paris, two months before this sojourn at Trouville, Liliane paid a visit to Mrs. Norton. She was overflowing with joy at finding her old friend and, the first embraces over, questioned her, looked fondly at her, and found her as beautiful as ever, though with a somewhat frail beauty; with features a little too much refined, but with an air at once soft and gentle. Liliane, who was tall and splendid looking, with golden hair, slender waist, large shoulders and a superb neck, asked Sylvia, almost in the first breath: "How do I look? Haven't I grown a little too stout? I exercise like an athlete to prevent myself from becoming too large.

But what would you have? I am twenty-five. I should be very sorry to see myself becoming fat."

In this first meeting, in the delightful abandon of these intimate conversations, there was a renewal of the old friendship, in which the threads of the past, like the fibers of an amputated limb, were all reunited, and the two friends found each other just as they had been in the past; but this time they did not exchange their dreams, but their memories and experiences. Both had still in mind this first conversation, the confidences exchanged, which more than once recurred to Sylvia and alarmed her.

"You are the first person I have met in Paris who has caused me a pleasure, my dear Liliane," repeated Sylvia.

"That is complimentary for the Parisians," said Mrs. Montgomery, laughing.

"I had no reference to them, since I do not know them," added Sylvia, sadly.

Certain that Mrs. Norton, by a reception, a concert, a fete, some noteworthy gathering or other—all of which Liliane loved—would announce her candidacy for a royal place in the gay Parisian society, a pre-eminence which sometimes lasts for a whole season, and which has for its *Moniteurs officiale*

the Jenkinsons of society, Mrs. Montgomery broached the interesting question at their very first interview.

“My dear Sylvia, if you do not know the Parisians so much the more pleasure there is in store for you. It is an amusing acquaintance to make. They are very gay, very artful! A little stiff, perhaps. Oh, you can not imagine it, my dear! Paris becoming English! That reminds me of London. If it were not for we Americans and the money we scatter there broadcast, along with a little of our new-world vivacity, a residence there would be as tiresome as in Germany.”

“Then Paris pleases you?”

“Very much; since I took Mr. Montgomery there, I have not had a dull moment, and yet——”

Liliane had stopped, and she sighed as if her heart were full of some nameless sorrow.

“And yet, what?” asked Sylvia.

“Nothing. You are happy, Sylvia. You have a husband entirely—high-minded.”

“Yes?”

“I say that Richard Norton is considerable of a man. He is not a prince, he is not a duke. That is all he lacks to be perfect. But he is charming; yes, charming! You ought to love him greatly.”

There was in this amusing chatter of the pretty

Mrs. Montgomery a good humor so striking, an atmosphere of happiness, and as it were a sort of show of well-being so insolent that Sylvia felt her melancholy charmed away by it. Liliane's talk had much the same effect upon the young woman as a cordial with the sparkling life of champagne. Sylvia found her, after her divorce, the same person she had known as a young girl, who used to dream of wearing a crown, who knew by heart the list of nobility for nearly all the countries of Europe, and who once seriously debated with herself the question whether she should not ask her father to buy the article thus advertised in the *New York Herald*:

“For Sale—The blason and use of the name of an aristocratic family of Europe, with the history of said family, for \$1,100. Address, Rudolph Smith, care of L. Moeser, 142 Smithfield St., Pittsburg.”

It was interesting to see how Liliane's father, permeated to the marrow of his bones by democratic sentiment, used to talk about this false aristocracy of Europe, the title to which could be bought for so many dollars, as if it were a question of so many boxes of coffee. Influenced by these sentiments, Liliane, who loved and respected her father, said nothing of her dreams of future nobility, but Sylvia had more than once surprised her reading

the *Inter-Ocean*, that journal which publishes lists of the eligible bachelors of the city with descriptions of their persons, their social relations, their business affairs, their habits and other interesting items of the like nature, for the delectation of ladies matrimonially inclined. And when Sylvia asked her friend what she sought in that newspaper, Liliane would answer laughing:

“I? A husband titled like a Montmorency!”

The love or passion, rather—a fire of straw which soon vanished in smoke—which she had for Harrison, had, at first, the effect to make her forget her fever for nobiliary honors—a fever not uncommon in the republic of King Cotton. But after being divorced in a burst of anger, and remarried for reasons of *convenience*, because Montgomery was rich and seemed to be fondly devoted to her, Liliane, in spite of herself came back to the dreams of her girlhood, and so she reproached Richard Norton as she had reproached poor Montgomery, for not being a prince or a duke.

“But, my dear Sylvia, in spite of the fact that he is neither prince nor duke, you love him?”

“Why should I not be grateful for all he does for me?” answered Sylvia. “Mr. Norton does not like Paris, yet he has come here because he thinks

that Dr. Fargeas alone can cure me of this species of nervous disorder which is undermining my health, a sort of cardiac affection, I do not know exactly what. Mr. Norton is full of cares for his business in New York, and yet he has left all for this new life in France, which he is trying to make as brilliant and enviable as possible for me. I know no better man, no more devoted friend, no more loyal heart."

Liliane listened, examining Sylvia with a slight mocking smile.

"Oh! what you say is terrible, simply terrible," she said.

"Terrible? How terrible? I am afraid you are as fond of mocking as ever, my dear Liliane."

"Fond of mocking? Not at all. But, my poor friend, your way of eulogizing your husband makes me think how I talk about mine. He is very nice my good Montgomery, very devoted; he is always on the watch to satisfy the slightest of my caprices, the least of my fantasies, but—but—only think of it—after all he is a Montgomery with but one *m*—Montgomery of Second avenue—canned goods and liquors. Believe me, my friend, all my aristocratic instincts are violated by such recollections. When I hear people talk about the only real Montgommerys,

the legendary Montgommerys, the Montgommerys of history, it seems to me as if some one were scratching my skin with a coarse brush, as if I were actually bleeding. To be called a Montgomery, and to be only a false Montgomery, an imported Montgomery, a Montgomery of the Almanach Bottin instead of the Almanach de Gotha! You must understand this, you who are an aristocrat like every good female republican of America."

"I understand," and Sylvia's voice had become soft, low and resigned, "that if you love Mr. Montgomery you ought to be happy."

"And I understand that perhaps you are not so very, very happy, though Richard Norton is—how did you put it a moment ago—the most loyal heart, the most devoted friend. Ah! we do not pay compliments when we really love. I will say more; it is nothing to say of the man you love: Ah! the scamp, ah! the rascal, but I adore him! On the contrary, this scamp immediately becomes an angel. That is the way I used to talk of Harrison."

"Harrison?"

"Yes; Mr. Montgomery's predecessor."

"But if you loved this Mr. Harrison, why were you divorced?" In the eyes of the handsome Lil-

iane there passed a flash of a half-forgotten anger. Then shrugging her shoulders, she said:

“Why? For a very simple reason. He deceived me. He was a painter. Painters must have models. He pretended that it would not do to pose me eternally for his pictures. It would give to his work a tiresome uniformity. All his female figures would have a family resemblance. His patrons would complain. It was not propitious for his talent. There must be a change. The needs of art demanded it. I did not understand. I became jealous. Then followed scenes. The matter was carried into the courts. There was a year of litigation—pleadings and counter-pleadings. At last all was terminated and Mrs. Harrison passed off the stage, only to reappear as Mrs. Montgomery. *Vive* Mrs. Montgomery! Mrs. Montgomery with one *m*,” added Liliane with a sigh, which caused Mrs. Norton to smile.

“You complain!” said Sylvia, “and Mr. Montgomery is so good—”

“*The most devoted friend—the most loyal heart,*” repeated Mrs. Montgomery, imitating Sylvia’s tone.

And as a sudden, sad expression appeared upon Sylvia’s face, she added: “I beg your pardon. What I have just said is wicked, especially as my griefs are

of no consequence. I am a little wild, you know. But you are melancholy. Do you suffer? No? Don't deceive me. Come," she said, taking both her friend's hands in her own, with a true tenderness, one of those movements characteristic of women, which denote absolute confidence, "you suffer a little; much, passionately?"

"Not at all."

Mrs. Montgomery shook her head doubtfully.

"You see, Sylvia, I am something of a physiognomist. You remember five years ago—at your father's house in New York—I was then Mrs. Harrison. Oh, that miserable Harrison! A young man used to come often. A Frenchman, whom we thought—how shall I say it—very agreeable."

"M. de Solis."

"Yes, the Marquis de Solis. You have not forgotten the name—nor I either. Marchioness! It would make me smile to be a marchioness. Madame la Marchioness de *Montgommery!* How well that would sound, announced by the master of ceremonies when you enter a parlor. Well, this Marquis de Solis—Georges de Solis, was it not? You see even his first name comes back to me. Well, I would have thought——"

"You would have thought what?"

“Nothing--one of my wild fancies. You know I have a good many of them.”

Mrs. Montgomery smiled while Sylvia tried to appear indifferent to this chatter whose light tinkle, however, sounded to her like the knell of a dear departed past.

“He was actually smitten with you, that Monsieur de Solis.”

“Smitten!”

“Yes, a Parisienne would say that he was fairly cracked about you.”

“Oh, Liliane!” Mrs. Norton’s voice, which before had sunk almost to a whisper, now became severe.

“Does the word shock you? Cracked? You will hear worse on the boulevards. It is true though, I would be willing to bet that M, de Solis—”

“Would have asked my hand in marriage, is what you meant to say. Well, you would lose, my dear Liliane,” replied Sylvia, speaking in a sharp, almost impatient tone. “And besides, my father—”

“Your father would not have consented. But happily, in America, we are free to marry as we like, of our own free will, and we may dispose of our own hand and live to repent it ever afterward. Yes, to repent it bitterly. I cannot understand why your father, who was not a parvenu, like so many others,

or a disdainful philosopher like mine, but a pure American—I cannot understand why he should not have been glad to see you a marchioness.”

The conversation, in spite of its frivolous character and of the cheerful manner of Mrs. Montgomery, seemed to affect Sylvia painfully; for after a few observations in which she essayed to show an entire indifference to what her friend was saying, she said firmly:

“Say no more of all that, I pray you. The past is past. As a young girl I may have given you an idea of my dreams, but they have taken their flight long ago.”

“Yes; but they have been tamed and the birds are returning. You have never heard M. de Solis mentioned since?”

“Never; I would be obliged to you not talk to me about him.”

“Sylvia,” said Liliane, “do not say that. You almost make me think that the little wound has not healed over yet. Why one would think that you were afraid to meet this gentleman. If your husband were to hear of it, he might be jealous, and if M. de Solis were present it might make him vain. Happily, he is far away.”

“Ah!”

Sylvia's exclamation sounded very much like a sigh of regret.

"Very far away." And Liliane added, curious to note the effect of her words upon her friend:

"You do not read the newspapers?"

"Very little!"

"Like every good Yankee I take bales of them and devour them all. In the first place because they mention me. Oh! it is amusing: '*The handsome Madame Montgommery! Madame Montgommery's latest toilette! Madame Montgommery is spending the season in the country—at the seaside.*' Some of them put it *de Montgommery*. That makes me sigh and laugh, too. And then they keep me posted as to the doings and whereabouts of my friends in America. There is not a supper given at Delmonico's—our *Café Anglais*—with whose bill of fare I am not made familiar. It is very funny. Well, M. de Solis—I do not know where I read that—M. de Solis is traveling. He is risking his life, I have forgotten where, for something or somebody, I do not remember what. He came very near being assassinated and even decapitated by the Black Flags, or the Yellow Flags, I am not quite sure of the color."

Ah!" said Sylvia again, in a voice which she tried to render indifferent.

“Why do people go among the Black Flags of Tonquin? People go to Paris, when they do not happen to have been born there, and if they are Parisians, they stay there. Is not that your opinion, Sylvia?”

“Certainly, but——”

“But what?”

“M. de Solis?”

“Ah! he still interests you. Well, he is safe and sound. He used his revolver it seems. The poor, dear American revolver, which has been so much abused. He used one of those pioneers of civilization with such telling effect that behold! the pirates, Chinese and others fled, pff!—like your dreams. Do not worry about the marquis! There is no danger, not the slightest!”

“I am glad to hear it; oh, so glad;” and she smiled now in response to Mrs. Montgomery’s searching look.

“Why, my poor Sylvia, you are all in a flutter. It is not my poor little story I hope.”

“No, this wretched nervousness, which the doctor will find some difficulty in curing, causes me pain at almost every movement. I am altogether too impressionable.”

“Bah! I do not count on Dr. Fargeas to cure you; I put my faith in ‘Dr. Paris.’ Dear Paris,

what a doctor it is. It has saved many others than you."

Continuing in the same gay, happy, bantering air, she added: "But it is true also that it has lost many, oh, so many."

Two months had passed since the friends had exchanged the confidences related above, in the rue Rembrandt, Paris. Sylvia had brought away from this interview a memory which troubled her, a sort of anxiety. She could not help thinking about Georges de Solis, who had come into her life in her father's home in New York, and whom she had at one time dared to dream of as fiancé, husband, the chosen and loved one. He had been but a bird of passage. He had come and gone, not before divining, however, that Sylvia was attracted to him. And had he not allowed the young girl to read what was in his heart? Had they not said to each other words which are never, never forgotten?

Why had Georges de Solis departed so suddenly leaving Sylvia so saddened—Sylvia who had determined to ask her father's permission to marry this French nobleman. He had murmured his love to her; he had involuntarily allowed her to suspect the avowal of a love which suddenly, as it were, vanished, disappeared. Why? She had guessed it

since. But, at first, her chagrin was cruel. Yes, she had divined it. M. de Solis had gone away, because he believed she would be rich, and he did not wish to be accused, he, a foreigner, of scheming to marry the daughter of one of the richest bankers in New York. If he had only known that the banker's ruin was so near at hand.

In thinking of this past, in reviving these days, forever flown, which Liliane's gossip had recalled, all instinct with life and sound, like a swarm of bees, attracted by the noise of a drum, Sylvia again saw herself in her chamber at her father's, overcome with grief, thinking of M. de Solis who was no longer there. He had carried away with him one of her illusions, one of her beliefs. She had thought herself loved. Then there came under the paternal roof Richard Norton, timid as a young girl, with the frankness of a child and the loyalty of a man. Encouraged by the father, he asked Sylvia if she would consent to unite her life with his, and yielding to the prayers of her father the young woman weakened, and then consented. It seemed to her since she no longer heard from M. de Solis, since he no longer seemed to love her to whom he had been so devoted—it seemed to her that it would be better to sacrifice herself without reflection, without hesita-

tion, since for her, this marriage which brought an unhoped-for joy to Norton, and a consolation to Mr. Harley, was a sacrifice, the immolation of a life. Besides, she respected Richard Norton. She had closed the unfinished romance and she said to herself that with a man of his worth and his devotion she could, without doubt, begin a happy life. And besides, in all the honesty of her heart, she resolved strictly to respond to the injunction of the minister who read the marriage service, that she would follow her chosen husband everywhere, always, "in good as well as evil report." She lived over again the day which had decided her life. Norton had sent and caused to be hung from the ceiling of her father's parlor, an immense floral bell, made of roses of all colors, from the tea rose to a variety almost purple in color, and there under this marriage bell, the minister had united Richard and Sylvia before an open Bible, which was closed with their mutual oath of fidelity.

The bell of red and white roses! How often since then Sylvia had heard it ring. Sometimes it rang joyously like the chimes of hope, more often it was like a knell, the knell of departed love; of a dead love and yet which seemed to be reviving in the depths of her heart. Yes, it seemed to revive

when her thoughts, stirred by the memories called up by Liliane, drifted back to him, as it were, without her volition. And Mrs. Montgomery had done this with her idle talk, the day she had recalled all this vanished past.

This emotion experienced when the two friends had first met and talked, after their long separation, was more violently felt by Sylvia now; and as she sat there by the side of Liliane, who was trying to charm away her melancholy, she thought of what Norton had just told her—that the marquis was in Trouville and that he had invited him to their house that very evening. Yes, this very evening, perhaps in this very parlor, she would see M. de Solis. In the hum of the conversations, in the chatter and laughter, with which Miss Arabella accompanied the refrain of some operetta by Sullivan, Sylvia watched the door, almost dreading the appearance of Georges de Solis.

He would soon show himself, suddenly, before these people, most of whom were indifferent to her, and she would have to receive him coldly and formally, him whose life she had once dreamed of partaking. She would force herself to appear calm, smiling even. She resolved that she would go straight to him, give him her hand, which might

tremble a little, but which would be the hand of a friend, and an honest woman.

Sitting by the side of Liliane, listening to the heavy, distant, continuous murmur of the sea, which borne upon the incoming tide rolled its breakers upon the beach with a majestic rhythm, she heard in the soothing voice of the waves, far away, half drowned in their murmur the ringing of bells—betrothal bells, marriage bells, the sad sound of the bell of roses, of the poor faded roses.

She looked at Norton.

With his massive frame outlined against the clear horizon, by the side of the silhouette of Colonel Dickson, straight and tall as a hop pole, Richard stood smoking a cigar in the balcony where he had been joined by Montgomery. The cigar finished, Norton returned to his guests and took a glass of kummel from the hands of Miss Eva, while Dr. Fargeas, distinguished by his long, white locks, his cleanly shaven face, and his nose like an eagle's beak, was sipping something out of a silver cup and was declaring to Norton that in spite of his horror of all alcoholic drinks, this brandy was really delicious.

"It is celebrated at all events," said Norton.

"In the two America's Mr. Norton's brandy is justly famous," added Montgomery.

“Moreover, it is French brandy, my dear doctor. Be assured, therefore, Cognac has never produced better. I bought this lot of a sea captain, who, out of a considerable fortune, saved only a cask of this brandy, which he did not want to part with. It may be that he intended to drown himself in it, as Clarence did in the famous butt of Malmsey. I paid its weight in gold for it. The captain afterward tried his luck at cards, and not being successful he, like a fool, blew his brains out, instead of beginning over again and wearing out his bad luck, a thing which is not always easy, but never impossible. I feel remorseful sometimes for having bought his brandy. He would have made himself drunk on it, which might have consoled him and he might now be alive in consequence.”

“That depends,” said Dr. Fargeas. “The mania for suicide is often independent of moral suffering. It is a matter of heredity. Atavism plays an important role in it.”

Richard Norton, standing erect, his glass of cognac in his hand, tapped the doctor's shoulder lightly and said:

“Ah, these doctors, these terrible doctors! they put fatality into everything.”

"Necessarily. The theory of heredity replaced in the modern world the fatality of the ancients."

"Suicide, then, is it a matter of fatality?"

"Yes, of a fatality of temperament very often."

"Then you do not believe in those insupportable ills which are sometimes thrown off with life, like a too heavy burden?"

"My dear Mr. Norton," answered the doctor, "I believe only in three things as insupportable—poverty, sickness and death. And yet humanity passes its time in bearing these things without suicide. Pshaw! If we killed ourselves for everything that irritates the nerves, the world would soon come to an end."

"Then you find life an excellent thing?" And Norton seemed anxious to push the doctor to the expression of some pessimistic theory.

"*Ma foi!* I do not find it perfect," said the doctor. "But as death is eighty or a hundred times worse than the sufferings which make up life, I prefer, after having studied both, life, bad as it sometimes is, to that famous release, which is, after all, a deliverance without appeal. And having said so much, I counsel you, my dear Norton, when you have any sorrow, do not meditate suicide; leave that to the imbeciles like your brandy merchant."

But you have nothing to fear on that score. You are a happy man."

"Oh!" said the American, "I am accustomed to trying conclusions with necessity."

As he spoke he looked with an expression of manly pride, of defiance, at the friends about him, who were tasting the captain's cognac; then with the pride of one who has created his own fortune, but without the ostentation which bespeaks the parvenu, he said:

"I could live just as easily with nothing, absolutely nothing, as with my present style of house-keeping, and I give you my word for it, I have no more need than others have for the millions which chance has given me."

The murmur of incredulity on the part of Montgomery, and of courtly protestation on the part of Dickson, were formulated by the doctor, who suddenly interrupted with:

"Chance, chance indeed! And how about your labor, my dear sir, and your skill, and your patience?"

"And chance," added Norton. "Oh, yes! chance or luck must also have its share of the credit. We must not be too proud of our success in the world, and if we acknowledge, what is true, that luck is

often our co-laborer in every victory, it is not so bad. It makes us compassionate for the poor, and indulgent for the vanquished. I have known so many good fellows who have sweat water and blood all their lives and arrived at what? nothing? Or, without atavism, my dear doctor, without heredity, whatever you may say to the contrary, at suicide like my poor, unfortunate captain. Oh! I have toiled and moiled, yes, like a slave, and I can still show rough calloused places on my hands which date from those rude times. I am not ashamed to avow it, when I think, let me see;" and leaning upon the mantel, his eyes half shut, as if, lulled by some pleasant memory, he was living over again some portion of his past. "It is exactly thirty years day for day—the date came to me this morning while answering my mail—it is exactly thirty years to-day since I, Richard Norton, ran a boat on the Hudson, at the time when I was assisting my father, of blessed memory, to carry fire wood to the market. When I think of that, however courageously I may have worked since, you can not make me believe that luck has not favored me, for it has given me riches, and with riches, the dear wife, for whom I would give my entire fortune."

He spoke in a firm tone, standing there, his eyes

resting fondly on Sylvia, who silently listened with a smile of devoted gratitude on her lips.

"Take care, Mr. Norton," said Liliane laughing, "take care! You must not speak too loudly of your happiness."

Norton looked at her a little uneasily.

"I know," he said, "it is tempting fate. But I will pay the ransom. Do you suppose if Mrs. Norton's health had not demanded it that I would ever have left New York for Paris? Yes," said Richard smiling at Fargeas, "it is the fault of this dear and illustrious master that I am here."

"My fault?" said the learned doctor.

"Yes, your fault. I proposed to you that you come to New York to treat Mrs. Norton specially, you, the great magician in nervous disorders."

"And I refused," said Fargeas.

"I offered you a fortune. Whatever you might have named. Yes, *carte blanche*."

"A cure by contract! But," answered the doctor very simply, "I had at Paris all my hospital practice, poor devils who could not offer me anything. In such a case, you know, I could not hesitate."

"The doctor is not very American," murmured M. de Bernière to Miss Eva, who was passing near him.

The pretty American girl made a courtesy. "But worthy to be, you are right!" she answered.

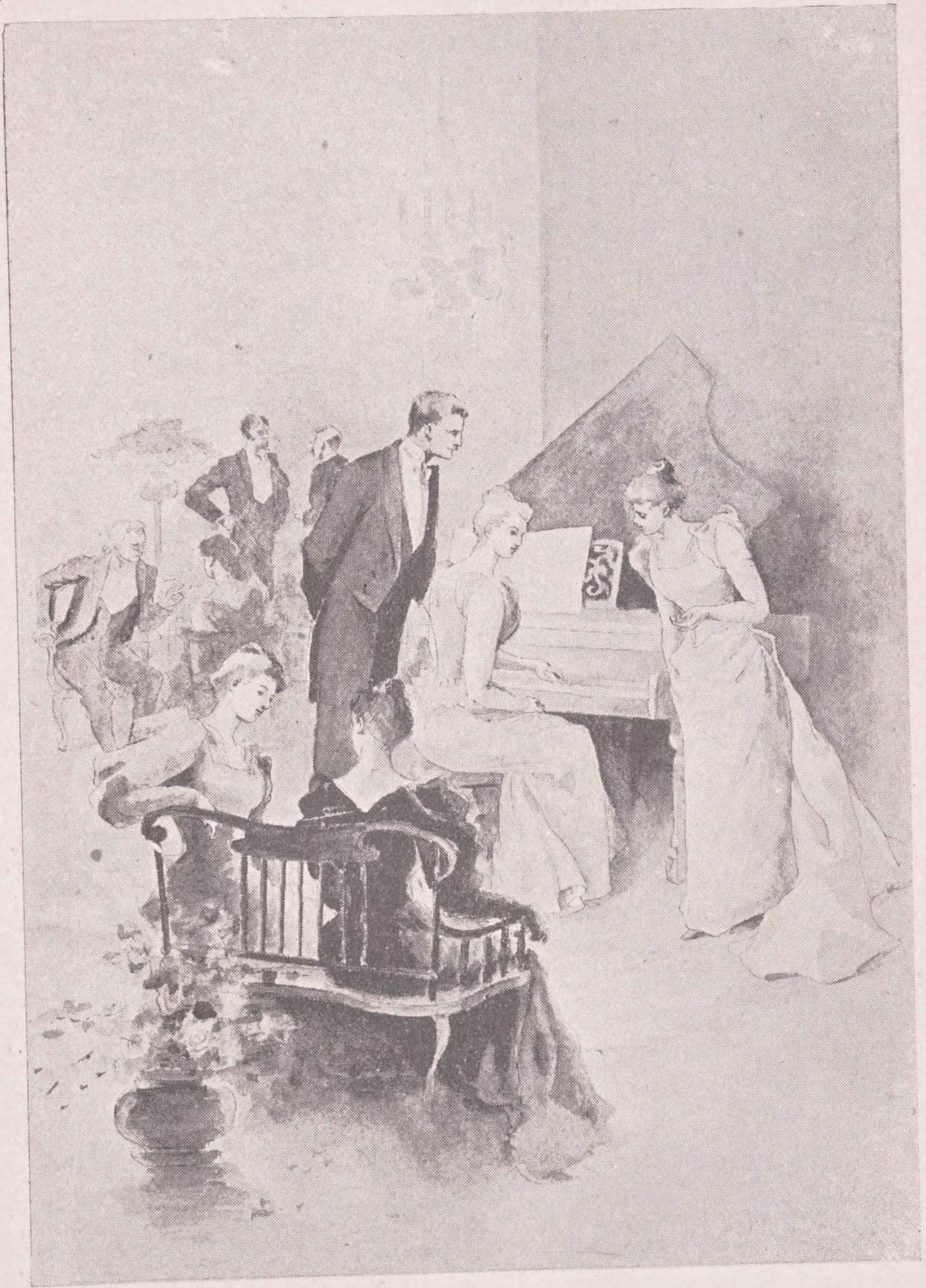
Bernière bit his lips, while the handsome Arabella said with her engaging Yankee accent:

"Listen to this piece, Monsieur le Vicomte. It is still better when I play the violoncello."

"And after all," continued Dr. Fargeas, who had risen, "what will best suit your dear invalid—who is not so ill now—no, madame, you are no longer so interesting—is distraction, travel, change of air. The world is very large and the best prescription, nine times out of ten, is written on a railroad ticket. An excellent system besides; for if the sick get well at a distance the doctor has all the credit for it just the same. If they are not cured, he has no responsibility in the matter, he is so far away."

"Then," said Norton, "I brought a part of my picture gallery to Paris. I furnished Mrs. Norton's room, at my hotel, rue Rembrandt, in such a manner that she might imagine herself in New York, at home in our American house, and I hope, Paris assisting, and Trouville into the bargain, that I shall take my wife back, smiling, cured and happy forever. Ah! the dream—happy forever!"

"I count on it also," said Dr. Fargeas; "Mrs. Nor-



THE PRETTY AMERICAN GIRL MADE A COURTESY.



ton has not done discredit to my prescriptions. You have no more nerves, now have you?"

"None at all," answered Sylvia, with a forced smile.

"Oh, nerves, nerves!" added Mrs. Montgomery, laughing. "A woman uses her nerves as she does her fan, for the necessities of the case. Have we really nerves?"

The big Offenburger had approached with kindling eyes when Norton had spoken of his pictures, as if he had heard some one tell out a sack of crown pieces. A collector of works of art, he knew the Norton gallery was famous.

"Did you say, my dear Mr. Norton, that you had had your pictures brought to France?"

"Those Mrs. Norton prefers; my Rousseaus and my Jules Dupres."

"Have you taken the precaution to have them insured?" continued the banker.

"Oh! Insurance is the rule of every good American. The Yankee is very adventurous, but very prudent. My pictures are worth a fortune. Yes, indeed, I am insured. If I lose them, they will pay me a fortune. What I would like to find, I repeat it without ceasing—like a refrain"—and he laughed—"is some company who would insure happiness."

“If such a company shall be formed,” said Dr. Fargeas, “do not subscribe to any of its stock. It will do a losing business.”

CHAPTER · IV.

Mrs. Colonel Dickson continued to watch, out of the corners of her big blue eyes, what was going on in the parlor. She was seated in the same place and still held in her hand her empty tea cup, to keep her in countenance, as it were. It seemed to her that the Viscount de Bernière, who was leaning over the piano, upon whose keys Arabella's taper fingers were idly wandering, was in a fair way to begin a flirtation. Miss Eva, whom the colonel's wife had at first judged to be insignificant, was moving here and there, discreet and smiling, accompanied by Mademoiselle Offenburger, with her handsome Israelitish profile, her plump shoulders, her small, finely proportioned hands and her eyes like those of a dying gazelle; and the presence of these two began to trouble the scheming Mrs. Dickson. She seemed, indeed, to have laid a decided claim upon Bernière, who was so amusing in his decadent dandyism, so attractive in his wit, his fortune and his title. Arabella might be a viscountess. The perspective was far from displeasing to the worldly minded mother. She had dreamed

of dukes, princes and highnesses. At Nice she had all but been taken in by a prince of the *table d' hote*, and after this adventure she was a little distrustful. Moreover, the colonel had inquired about Bernière. He was of a good family, an orphan and had a *bona fide* title. Arabella might, therefore, flirt with propriety.

It was the little German girl who most worried Mrs. Colonel Dickson.

Mademoiselle Offenburger was, evidently, very adroitly directing some tender glances in M. Bernière's direction. Perhaps she, too, had some views in regard to the viscount. Bernière felt himself, in consequence, softly enveloped with these pretty attentions and advances, which tickled his pessimistic vanity. He found the handsome Arabella delicious, and the little Jewess attractive and appetizing. And Miss Eva, who rallied him at will, seemed devilishly piquant, very piquant indeed. But Bernière was not thinking seriously about either of them. For the moment, like a practical philosopher, he was watching the far-away lights of Havre, and was saying to himself that it was pleasant, after an exquisite dinner, to hear agreeable music played by a pretty woman.

Paul de Bernière had made up his mind to play

this role of auditor, spectator and connoisseur of life, everywhere and always. He had soon recognized that there is nothing of consequence in existence outside of the sensations of art, the influence of good music, or of choice poetry. He piqued himself upon passing for a decadent, a being who has been deceived in life, and was mildly ironical, without the grand bursts of anger, which characterized the romantic recalcitrants of an earlier epoch, and without the disdainful bearing of the blazé youth of his acquaintance.

During the entire dinner the young man had observed and studied the company present. Taking life ordinarily for a spectacle to which he brought no great passion, hardly a grain of curiosity, he found in the actual situation something original and unexpected—for he felt himself watched at the same time by the Offenburgers and the Dicksons—by Germany and America as it were. Parisian to his finger tips, a little tired of everything, having never had, even at twenty years, those mad follies common to youth, Bernière had taken, as he termed it, a stall in the spectacle of life and cared little to take part in the play. What was the good in playing a role? As an actor, one would have neither the right nor the time to hoot at and hiss down the others.

Rich enough to gratify his fancies, the viscount had no caprices, simply because he could satisfy them. Had he been loved he would not have allowed himself to be compromised in any way—women are so queer—but certainly, he said, he had never really loved with a true, a serious love. His heart had been torn in tatters in amourettes, in petty love passages. At least so he said, a little vauntingly at times. But really he had a horror of sentiment. The ideal was to him a trifle ridiculous. He believed only in science, and even that was wearisome. At eighteen years of age he had fought bravely in a battalion of Mobiles, and for two long months in one of the forts of Paris he lived under the constant fire of shells from the German batteries. It was rare that he talked of these things afterward. The war seemed to him to be a disagreeable memory to be banished. He had burned, thinking them ridiculous, the old photographs of 1871, which represented him as a beardless boy in his uniform of French soldier. He was never heard to talk of battles, though he had the medal of a military brevet hid away in a corner, nor of his country, though he had exchanged a shot with an Italian officer at the Rhigi in Switzerland, who had spoken slightingly at the *table d'hôte* of our Zouaves.

Paul de Bernière was an amiable skeptic, a boastful doubter, pretending that all the young men of to-day resembled him. Having been presented to Norton in Paris, he had become intimately acquainted with him at Trouville—thanks to Dr. Fargeas, his friend—and he listened willingly to the admonitions of the American, whom he envied as a practical man, and to the counsels of Sylvia, whose voice produced the same effect upon him as music; but he had nothing more pressing to do than to forget both.

The viscount affected to make a show of the pessimism which was invading the brains of the young men of his time like a slow poison. Disgusted with the hollowness of the daily discussions he heard around him, he felt a sensation of intellectual *æmia*, not indeed without its charm, like those delicious torpors which precede sleep. Thinking it would be almost ridiculous to protest against current follies or to become indignant over the infamies of society, whose numbers had grown so great that they seemed to invade his world like a rising tide, he allowed himself to glide along with the current of the day, living the life of a curious on-looker, since he would have been out of place in the character of a hero, and wearing, like a flower in his button-hole this name of decadent which admirably

sums up the weariness and abdication of those of his age. To be disillusioned, a partisan of abdication in all things, did not, besides, seem to him to be either a misfortune or a vice. There were for this refined intellect, in the periods of decadence, spectacles of social decomposition much more interesting than the dramatic scenes of the grand epochs of faith. And, like one leaning with his elbows on the parapet of his box at the theater, he gazed upon the comedy of life which was being played before him; and so attractive were its effervescing peculiarities, that he did not even feel tempted to express his disapproval of its laxity and immorality.

This Parisian, firm in his intention not to be the dupe of a time politely egotistic and elegantly corrupt, feared two things above all others—to be the object of ridicule and the victim of a passion.

Bernière had no reason to dread the former. He was what might be called a charming man. His form had all the slenderness of youth, his mustache was blond and curled lightly over finely cut lips. His hair waved naturally, and, with a monocle in his right eye, he bore some resemblance to a handsome cavalier in citizen's dress, and on seeing him one looked instinctively for a spur on his heel and a bit of ribbon in his button hole. Tall, nervous, with

small hands and feet, there was a special elegance in his whole form. It was a grace without haughtiness, with a certain seductive *laissez-aller* which differed from the English rigidity, a special attractive informal elegance which is so characteristic of the French.

As for passion Bernière might not have escaped that so easily. In this respect, his disdain might have resulted from some early misplaced confidence. Paul de Bernière might have loved with too much confidence and with a faith too vivid. He had discovered that he was a fool, and had suddenly recovered entire possession of himself. Hereafter no one should surprise his confidence. He was like those art amateurs who love to exhibit their treasures to their friends, but who at the first absurd utterance of an ignorant admirer, at the first touch of a rude hand, put them under lock and key, like misers, and never show them again. So Arabella, Helene Offenburg and Eva Meredith might be as exquisite, seductive and distracting as they liked, the heart of Bernière was closed.

Yes, hereafter he would hold his heart in his own keeping, that treasure, already a little worn and damaged. He did not fancy playing the role of dupe any longer. In the domain of sentiment he

would be an amateur, a scoffer, and would make no sacrifice of himself. Resolved not to marry, for, of all deceptions to be dreaded, the most terrible for him was the morrow after the marriage, he would calmly live his life of bachelor to the end, complicating his existence neither by wife nor children. What folly when one is free to alienate one's liberty.

But in spite of the mocking smile which curled his lip, Bernière had been for some time more troubled and irritated than he would be willing to have known. For example, he thought at times that he would never again set foot within the walls of the Norton mansion, though he had always been received there with a touching cordiality. Miss Meredith's curling black hair, with its tempting frizzes over the forehead, haunted him too persistently; and since he had been at Trouville he thought too often of that clear voice, that open, friendly look, of the hand frankly extended to him, of that charm which seemed to envelop the young girl. He felt too keen a pleasure in going to visit these Americans whom he called friends.

The latter part of the winter's social season seemed insipid to him because the *five o'clock's* did not come twice a day.

It was time to go to the watering places. In

Paris, life was dreary and uninteresting. The Parisian life, the life of a young man who is rich and curious to know everything, is, however, very much occupied. The invitations, visits, first representations at the theatre, exhibitions of fencing, all the daily distractions, fatiguing as labor itself, of the Parisian who wants to know everything simply because some time he may feel tempted to sneer at it all; this perpetual movement in a void; this eternal repetition of things already seen, bored Bernière. An evening passed at Norton's as at Trouville, on this day, caused him on the contrary to again find a relish in existence.

Only, in his opinion, the image of Miss Meredith was too much in his thoughts. He had not sworn never to love, only to fall into the toils of this little Yankee, this bird of passage, destined to again traverse the ocean.

As this sentiment from day to day entered into and took possession of him, at first with a sort of latent and then with a fascinating power, Paul resisted it, thinking it absurd that he should be thus caught. The thought irritated him, as well as the grace of Eva, who treated him with that frank intimacy which distinguishes young girls of her country. Then he had a violent desire to pack his

trunks and leave Trouville for Dinard where he might finish the summer season, or for some corner of Brittany, or for Douarnenez or devil knows where. But after all, he said to himself, it would be giving too much importance to a state of mind which at most was very vague, to endeavor to escape from it by flight. What did he care for Miss Meredith and what was this feeling he had for her? Supposing even—which he denied—that there was a semblance, a phantom, an atom of love in it—well he would amuse himself with it. Flirting is an occupation like any other. It bears the same relation to love that idle gabble does to eloquence. A diversion at least.

“As to love—bah—love! We must learn to root it from the heart as one cuts a corn from his foot,” said the viscount. “It belongs no more immediately to our individuality than a callous does.”

During the dinner he had studiously avoided looking at Miss Meredith, but divided his glances of admiration between the blue eyes of Miss Arabella Dickson and the dark tender orbs of Mademoiselle Offenburger. The colonel's wife had been delighted to hear, amid the clatter of the knives and forks, this appreciative remark of the viscount upon the beauty of her daughter:

“Blue eyes and a white skin—they are like a couple of violets fallen in the snow.”

But, on the contrary, Mrs. Dickson was not so well pleased when Bernière, after the dessert, had strongly insisted upon Dr. Fargeas telling him where the Offenburgers came from.

“Mademoiselle Offenburger is charming, doctor, but there is about her something exotic, something of the Arab, of the oriental—”

“Mademoiselle Helene seems to pre-occupy you a good deal, dear viscount,” interrupted the colonel’s wife, with the least perceptible shade of irritation in her tone.

“Pure curiosity, madam. If there is a woman here who pre-occupies me, it certainly is not Mademoiselle Offenburger.”

Mrs. Dickson was silent a moment, beaming upon the young man with an engaging air, while the two loto balls which did duty for eyes were moistened with sweet maternal tears. In the meantime, Dr. Fargeas answered Bernière.

“Mademoiselle Offenburger is indeed an exotic, my dear, raised in France. Her father is a Hamburger and her mother was an Englishwoman.”

“Madame Offenburger is dead, then?”

“Years ago. Mademoiselle Offenburger is very

nice. You are right when you say she is charming, my dear Paul. She is an adorable creature—a little composite—very well educated. I should say a little too learned for my taste, but exquisite. And practical! She is a type of the true modern young woman, my friend. She is as modern in knowing all things as you are in believing nothing!”

“And who has told you that I believe in nothing?” replied Bernière, who, to amuse his caprice, was examining Miss Meredith and comparing her to the tall statuesque Arabella and to this dimpled Helene Offenburger.

He was, first of all, a too thorough Parisian, a Parisian of the upper and lower strata of society, not to know Offenburger, whose pretty daughter was as delicate and refined in limb and feature, as he was coarse and stout.

The Hamburger was a tall, fine-looking man, fat and protuberant of stomach, all chin and cheeks, the nose large and blunt, pendent over enormous red lips, black whiskers resembling curled horse-hair, so very black that at a distance one had in looking at him the impression of two plaques of India ink on a pink skin. The great black oriental eyes rested upon men and things with an affectation of placid good will, but which was in reality a sort of

good-humored disdain, the personal assertion of his own superiority.

Such was the father of the bewitching Helene. When he wore his hat, which he kept always, if not on his head, at least in his hand, he appeared young still with the frame of a handsome Turk, and a complexion whose tints were warm and clear. He only showed his age when he uncovered, allowing to be seen, as at present, a bald crown, knobby with protuberances, and of a decidedly more yellow hue than his face, contrasting so strongly with the red hue that Paul de Bernière mentally compared the banker to a sherbet of vanilla and gooseberry, the vanilla on top. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why M. Offenburger so generally kept his hat pulled over his brows.

On the surface he was a very good man—iced and sugared. The viscount might have gone even further in his comparison of him with the sherbet. He was a man of excellent taste; an inveterate collector of works of art and curios, paying dearly the agents who in his behalf took by assault the bibelots under the fire of bids in the auction rooms, at the Hotel des Ventes, lending his tapestries and ivories to the public expositions, if only to have the joy of reading in the catalogues and labels:

"*Collection of M. Moses Offenburger;*" having in his stables blooded horses which had won medals at the race courses, and in his kennels a pack of hounds which had gained the first prize awarded by the committee, at the exhibition at the Tuilleries. Luxurious in his style of living, he was yet a democrat. He was appealed to whenever a struggling journal was to be founded. He insisted that he loved France, that there was no country but France in the world; and Bernière had even experienced, at dinner, a peculiar annoyance, in spite of his decadentism in hearing the Hamburger deplore with his over-the-Rhine accent, the *plunders* they were making in France and the *degadence* of this *creat, fery creat* country.

The origin of Offenburger's fortune was not exactly known. He had fallen upon Paris, fifteen years before, like an aerolite, but an aerolite of gold. He had attracted notice around the Lac by his equipages; the lorgnettes at the opera by the diamonds of his wife, since dead, and afterward by the beauty of his daughter. He had attracted the reporters to his hotel by his receptions and his Tokay; the painters by his purchases of pictures; the brokers by his operations at the Bourse, and, little by little, this mixture of heterogeneous author-

ities and interests massed about him and formed an enormous ball which rolled across Paris, one would say a ball of snow, if Offenburger's renown had been perfectly immaculate.

King of a republic of stock-jobbers and speculators, this Hamburger, perhaps a naturalized Frenchman, had become, by the complicity of the good journalists, and the small fry of finance, a sort of bizarre power who held the mean between the diplomatic agent and the money lender. Ministers consulted him to know what the ambassador of his country thought of their declarations. He gave to the governments of Europe his opinions on the affairs of France; honored in wearing on fête days the decoration of his sovereign, he pretended that the statesmen on the banks of the Seine were too much frightened by radicalism, and did not take a sufficiently advanced position on the questions of the day.

Offenburger not only associated with the politicians who negotiate loans, and the gazetteers who unmake the politicians, but he made the most also of his democratic acquaintances, as the cream of high life.

He invited to his paper hunts clubmen of renown, noblemen to whom the columns of the *Vie*

Parisienne are like the Almanach de Gotha. The Marquis d'Ayglars, who was still frisky in spite of his fifty years, was the beater-up of game for this chase of decayed nobility. This man, it was said by some, served Offenburger out of friendship, while others affirmed that he acted as a paid counsellor in performing the functions of major-domo at the chateau of Luzancy, as he might have performed those of his own castle, if Ayglars had not been razed by the land speculators—the *bande noire*.

Offenburger did not buy a horse or give an order to his saddler without the consent of the marquis. It was for Offenburger that Ayglars went to Tattersall's, it was for Offenburger that he drew up a sort of code of ceremonial which the banker studied and conned like a scholar who is anxious to pass an examination for his degree. The marquis was to Offenburger, in all questions relating to horses, what Saki-Mayer was in questions relating to art curios. He busied himself about blooded animals as the Jew dealer did about antiques. This is why the Archduke Heinrich, when that prince came to France, said that Moses Offenburger had entertained him at Luzancy as the surintendents used to entertain the Sun-king, in the time before the Bastille; that Mazas of the olden time.

“That Offenburger,” he said, “has the best Johannisberg I ever drank. His horses are better groomed than those of the Emperor, my brother. A ball might be given in the stables, they are so clean. He has most admirable pictures, the most extraordinary curiosities; his table is the best appointed I know, and his kennels are astonishing. That Offenburger actually disgusts me!”

Paul de Bernière recalled one by one all these stories of Parisian gossip, while examining the big man without a country, who had chosen Paris for a residence simply because he could find more pleasure there than in Hamburg; but in noting the soft, voluptuous outlines of the charming Helene he forgot all the ridiculous characteristics of the father and amused himself, as an amateur only, in comparing the three young ladies, Mademoiselle Offenburger, pretty as a Turkish odalisque, Arabella, majestic as Houdon's Diana, and Eva, truly exquisite with her innocent look, the look of a pure girl. There was also the handsome Mrs. Montgomery and Sylvia Norton, seated in the half shadow; and Bernière enjoyed an artistic pleasure in seeing these adorable creatures, assembled like so many works of art in a museum, and analyzed them with the eye of a connoisseur, of a refined critic without the least

thought of falling in love, for had he not decided that he would never love any one?

And while Miss Dickson sang to her own accompaniment an American song, a sort of quavering negro melody, through which there ran an undercurrent of melancholy, like the wail of slaves, Paul, with his epicurean dilettantism, with a feeling of voluptuous content, was comparing his position of a skeptic in repose to the feverishly, laborious life of his host, Norton, or to that of Montgomery, or of Offenburger, burdened with the cares of business, or of the colonel exhibiting his daughter throughout the world, or even of Fargeas, living in the midst of human suffering, while he, Bernière, was enjoying the delicious *far niente* of an existence devoted to pleasure. Free, pampered, a favorite among women, he felt like saying:

“I want no preoccupations. I prefer smiles rather and the liberty to judge for myself.”

During the dinner he noticed a strange expression in Sylvia's look, which set him to thinking, and he said to himself:

“Who will pretend that a young girl is an undecipherable enigma. The most difficult being to decipher is not the young girl but the woman. What is Mrs. Norton thinking about and what is the

malady from which she suffers? For she is suffering! She is suffering, and I defy the skill of the great neurologist, Dr. Fargeas, to explain to me what it is."

And now, to satisfy his curiosity—for Mademoiselle Offenburger had succeeded Arabella at the piano, and was playing a selection from Beethoven—Bernière seated himself opposite Mrs. Norton, who was half reclining upon a lounge, and began to study her. She was no longer talking with Mrs. Montgomery, but was listening, as if charmed, to the exquisite music.

He could see only her profile. There was a sort of sadness in the attention which she paid to the symphony. Her brows were knitted over her blue eyes, and in the palpitation of her fine nostrils, there was evinced a feverish emotion. All that may have proven simply that Sylvia was an artist and that all her being was vibrating to that voice of the beyond.

Miss Eva, standing near the piano, was as much moved as Mrs. Norton. The little American, with her hands crossed, listened in ecstasy. The impassible Arabella was seated by the side of her mother, who condescended to compliment Mademoiselle Offenburger with a smile in which disdain and envy were mingled.

Helene Offenburger was a consummate musician, a little dry and methodic, perhaps, but sure. When she had finished, Bernière could not help applauding. Offenburger beamed, and the Dicksons paid her the tribute of a perfunctory smile. Sylvia, in her delight, held out her hands to Helene, who, after having clasped them warmly, threw back with a pretty, quick gesture, the meshes of her black hair, which had fallen over her forehead.

"How happy you must be, mademoiselle, to be so good a musician," said Eva.

Helene showed no astonishment nor anxiety. She knew she was an excellent musician and did not give herself any coquettish airs in consequence. It was simply a fact. She would tell with utter simplicity how her professor had been pleased with her, saying that if she cared to give concerts she would certainly make a name, a great name in music.

"But I like the bank better," she added smiling.

Then they talked about Beethoven. Eva told, in a few soft words, what delicious tremors she experienced in hearing the master's music, and then they discussed the respective merits of Beethoven and Mozart.

"I was expecting Mozart," said Bernière.

But what he did not expect was the manner in which Mademoiselle Offenburger demonstrated the superiority of Beethoven by the volume of the latter's brain, for this young girl, who but a moment before had evoked from the piano, music which seemed the soul of poetry and the material of dreams, now easily drifted, to the astonishment of Sylvia, the amusement of Bernière, and the terror of Liliane Montgomery, into a discussion of the relation between encephalic volume and intellectual development. And she said *encephalic*. She did not frown, she did not smile, and her little mouth, with its ripe red lips, was provokingly charming while she uttered these bits of statistical wisdom. Then she passed from Beethoven's cranium to that of another, not a musician but a thinker.

"Do you know," she said, "that Descartes' cranium had a capacity of 1,700 centimetres more than that of the mean of Parisian craniums of to-day?"

And that was not all. The skull of La Fontaine measured 1,950 centimetres, exactly the same as that of Spurzheim. The brain of another contemporaneous writer, who had just been interred, weighed 2,012 grammes, a little less than Cromwell's.

"And Cromwell's?" asked Liliane Montgomery, mockingly, thinking to embarrass the young woman.

"2,230 grammes," came promptly from the rosy lips of the pretty Jewess.

The big banker puffed out his chest with pride and Mrs. Dickson looked at the colonel as if to say:

"Well, what can Arabella do to match that?"

But Arabella sat motionless as a statue, looking at the sea with an impassive stare.

In thus showing off her varied learning there was no affectation in Mademoiselle Offenburger's manner. She told what she knew. It was all very simple.

Mrs. Montgomery seemed dazed, as if she had heard something hitherto unknown, a language she did not understand.

"I'll wager you, my dear Eva," she said laughing, "that you were ignorant of all that."

"I? Madam, oh! I am not learned," answered Miss Meredith. And she, too, put nothing of pique, or false modesty in her answer. She was ignorant of these things, she frankly avowed it, which was very natural to a creature who was naturalness itself.

But strange to say, all this scientific erudition of Mademoiselle Offenburger did not displease Paul de Bernière. To him she was curious, this young girl with the oriental profile—very curious. A cyclopædia with velvety eyes was piquant. He would not

have dared to talk anthropology with her, but it was diverting to hear her speak so prettily, in her soft, sweet voice, about cranial capacities, and to see her, as it were, almost weigh the brains of the illustrious dead in her little dimpled hand. What a delightful little lecturer. She may have been a professor. Paul was strongly tempted to ask her.

“What do you think of Mademoiselle Offenburger?” asked Mrs. Montgomery.

“Very pretty, very pretty! But I shouldn't like to be obliged to pass my baccalaureate before her. I would not succeed!”

“As a bachelor, perhaps, but as a husband, I think not.”

“As a husband,” said Bernière, “I shall never have my diploma.”

“You were, however, cut out for a married man,” said Dr. Fargeas, who had joined the group.

“I?” And Bernière smiled. “Oh, doctor, what have I done to merit this opinion?”

“You? Your pessimism is false, your skepticism is imaginary, your irony is disingenuous and I prescribe as a remedy the chimney corner—”

“Along with the pots and stewpans! Thanks, no, doctor.”

Mrs. Dickson had overheard, and this anti-matri-

monial declaration on the part of the young man brought a contemptuous smile to her lips. She was about to protest against the viscount's impertinent comparison when the door opened and a valet announced Marquis de Solis.

The entrance of Georges was greeted by a universal cry of salutation, and Norton, leaving the colonel's side, crossed the room in two or three strides, and going straight to the marquis, held out both hands in a warm welcome.

"How do you do? Well, this is so good of you!"

The American looked anxiously toward his wife, who had risen looking very pale, while Mrs. Montgomery watched her covertly, with a crafty smile upon her lips.

Mrs. Norton remained standing before the lounge, upon which she had just been seated by the side of Liliane, and Norton came toward her to present M. de Solis. The latter bowed and murmured the usual commonplaces, and in the momentary pause which ensued he looked into Sylvia's eyes with an inquiring look.

He had come suddenly, with a sort of precipitation, after having debated with himself for a part of the evening the question whether he should come or not. He felt by instinct that it was a grave moment

in his life, and might be painful. At one time he decided that he would not come, but would leave Trouville without seeing Sylvia.

He had, since the evening before, quitted the *Roches Noires* and had rented in a private house a chamber whose windows looked out upon the sea. Leaning from the balcony he saw to his left the jetty, the line of the beach, the houses of Deauville; yonder, before him, the bathing beach with its hum, its swarming life, the chatter of the promenaders—all dominated and dwarfed by the grand voice of the ocean. He lived there—his expression to Norton was exact—*tete-a-tete* with his mother. This household, consisting of an old woman and her son, was charming, idyllic. The marquis had on the evening before considered that it would be wrong to his dear mother to pass an evening away from her, after so many long months of separation. He had found her, with what joy, on his return as handsome as ever, her black eyes beaming beneath her gray hair. Near her Solis felt like a whipped child who comes to his mother's side for comfort and receives her too indulgent caresses. His life, tormented with unrealized dreams, torn, bitter, but without pessimism and without despair, was to find an end in this sweet calm; and the man who had traversed

the universe in search of distractions was to find at last that nothing is equal to his mother's love, narrow and warm as a cradle.

A single evening taken from this intimacy was much. It was too much. The marquis had decided to live like a savage. He concealed himself in his apartments, and it seemed to him that he should never have enough time to tell to the marchioness all that he had seen in his travels. She listened to him with delight and devoured him with her eyes with the selfish joy of those who adore. They lived in a sort of honeymoon of filial and maternal tenderness. The mother felt that at last she saw him again, had him with her, this son who had been to the ends of the earth. She devoured him with looks which at times became anxious, for instinctively the mother divined the presence of some melancholy, the memory, perhaps, of a disappointed love.

Yes, at first the Marquis de Solis felt a sorrow in leaving the marchioness, in taking away from her a minute of that joy which was hers by right, and then suddenly he had experienced a fierce desire to see Sylvia again. He felt a sensation of curiosity, as of one who desires to look again upon a pool of dormant water which had once reflected his image, to

see if the phantom, the shadow of his former self were still there.

And now Sylvia was there before him, in appearance cold, and stiffly formal, but upon her lips, which trembled a little, there was a sweet, sad, confiding smile.

“My dear Sylvia,” said Norton, in his frank, manly voice, “I need not present to you my friend, M. de Solis. He is indeed a friend, in every sense of that word, unhappily much abused. Almost a brother, aren't you, Solis?”

“Almost a brother, yes,” answered the marquis, with a huskiness in his voice.

Everybody in the parlor was looking on. Miss Arabella even placed a lorgnon to her pretty eyes to examine the newcomer whose title pleased her—marquis!

Sylvia, by a supreme effort, held out her hand to Georges de Solis, who scarcely touched it as if he were afraid to take it in his own.

“Well, well,” said Norton, joyously, “it is an old friendship, a double friendship, you know,” while Liliane whispered to her husband:

“You'll see, he is going to ask Sylvia to put the marquis on her list of intimate friends.”

“What do you say, my dear?” asked Montgomery.

"Nothing! Nothing that concerns you, or rather yes. But no matter," and turned her head away.

"Now, my dear Georges," continued Norton, "in the place of one friend here you have two, for Mrs. Norton will prove to you that there are American ladies who love their firesides and also the guests of the family fireside."

"There! What did I tell you?" said Mrs. Montgomery. "Oh! these husbands!"

"Well!" ejaculated Montgomery, who still did not understand the meaning of his wife's words.

"Well, you cannot understand, you are one of them."

Mademoiselle Offenburger, who was studying the Marquis de Solis with her gazelle-like eyes, asked laughing:

"Does monsieur imagine that all American women are as extravagant as those we so often see in Paris?"

"Yes," said Sylvia.

The marquis bowed:

"I beg pardon, madam," he said. "It is in your country, especially, where a young woman may travel alone from one end of the Union to the other without being insulted, that I have learned to respect that which is the most worthy to be re-

spected in the world, the graciousness of a modest woman.”

“Very good!” said Miss Eva laughing; “for a Frenchman, that is very good.”

“How? For a Frenchman? Why, for whom does this granddaughter of the Mohicans take us?” said Dr. Fargeas to Bernière.

Bernière smiled.

“Oh, it is easily understood,” said he; “she doesn’t take us at all—see?”

Sylvia had remained mute before Solis. She wished, however, to find something to say, something in which the present, with all its rights, its reality, its duty, should be affirmed without effacing from her memory the sacred, venerated past, which was so dear to her.

“My husband,” she began, determined that these revered words should be the first her lips should utter, “my husband was right in saying that you would be twice welcome with us, M. de Solis. After receiving you at my father’s house, I shall be happy—to receive you at my own, as——”

“As formerly,” said Georges with a choking in his throat.

Mrs. Montgomery could not help letting slip a

little *hum*, which she immediately tried to pass off for a slight cough.

Sylvia sat down quickly, as if she felt her strength failing her, and Norton, who had noticed the action, came softly toward her and asked if she were ill.

"It is nothing, I assure you. A little giddiness; the sun was so hot this afternoon!"

"Let me take you into the air on the balcony. I assure you that you are ill. You are feverish." He touched her hand as he spoke.

Sylvia began to laugh.

"I? A fever? Is it so, doctor?" And she held out her hand to Dr. Fargeas.

"Mr. Norton is right, madame," said the doctor.

"You have a slight acceleration of the pulse; but a little rest——"

"I never felt better. The fever? Well, it is Trouville that has given it to me; that is all. I would like to go back again."

"Go back again?" said Liliane.

Norton nodded, "We will go back, my dear Sylvia, when the doctor permits it—when you are cured. But you remember the voyage and the dangers incurred. The doctor will not suffer you to have any illusions in the matter. He alone will

authorize you to quit Europe. Your ticket will be his prescription."

"Cured!" thought Sylvia, whose eyes instinctively followed Georges de Solis, who was talking with Miss Eva and Mademoiselle Offenburger, in the light of a large lamp at the farther end of the room.

Miss Eva was in a bantering mood, recalling to M. de Solis what he had said to Norton about America and American women. Laughing merrily, she said:

"Ah! it appears, monsieur, that you do not like us."

"Mademoiselle!"

"Oh, you are free to think what you like of the American women; for my part I think your Parisiennes are exquisite. I can understand how they may be preferred to all other women. And yet I am a patriot to my finger ends. Nothing in the world is equal to America. Nothing except Paris. Is it not so, Mademoiselle Helene?"

"Oh! that depends," said Mademoiselle Offenburger, speaking seriously. "Paris seems to me to be a city given over to thoughts--so--so unimportant."

"Bah!" said Bernière drawing near. Liliane, who had heard this blasphemy, came also to defend

her Paris—that Paris which had been so gaily conquered by America.

“How unimportant; the fashions, the theatres, the races, the salon, the art exhibitions?”

“All that is important but not serious,” said Mlle. Helene.

“My daughter and myself would like to see more *crafty* in the nation, for the *vuture testiny* of France. My daughter as well as myself, fancies that the *vuture testiny* of France would be better assured if the national character had a little more *crafty*,” added the big Offenburger in his guttural accent.

“*Crafty! crafty!*” Bernière was strongly tempted to fling his *gravity* in his teeth and to beg that he would at least speak French when discussing the *future* of France.

Miss Eva slowly answered the learned Jewess:

“I, who am a Yankee in the strictest sense; I, who am proud to say that the hotel at the park Monceau belongs to my uncle, Richard Norton, an American, that its conservatory is illuminated by Edison lights—Edison, an American—that it is adorned with paintings by Mr. Harrison—”

“Hum!” muttered Montgomery, who did not relish hearing his wife’s first husband spoken of.

“Harrison an American,” Miss Eva went on; “I

who adore New York, who am, I repeat, proud of my country, who think that America has no rivals, I avow that Paris does not displease me greatly. I thought I should be homesick for Brooklyn bridge—not yet—I adore the theatre; and in this respect Paris, which I do not like in all points of view, is incomparable. Do you not think so?" she added, addressing Mlle. Offenburger.

"My daughter," answered the fat Hamburger, "detests plays."

"Ah! What is Mlle. Offenburger doing in Paris then; looking after her health?"

"Her purgatory, perhaps," said Bernière.

"She prefers the Sorbonne," answered the father.

"And the College of France," gravely added Mlle. Helene.

Bernière, leaning toward the doctor, whispered gaily, "She is no woman, but a thesis."

The doctor, who was looking for his hat, found himself near Mrs. Montgomery, who asked him, merrily:

"By the way, doctor, what about my neuralgia?"

"Oh, your neuralgia is a negligible quantity. It amounts to nothing at all."

"But do you not fear that the sea air——"

"Oh! You want me to send you to Vichy, do you?"

"Not at all. I am having an excellent time at Trouville, but I dread the——"

"The sea air? It is excellent, I assure you."

"But you said the contrary last year!"

"Because it was last year. The fashion changes. Last year you wanted to go to Luchon."

"Then Trouville is not bad for headaches?"

"It is perfect—only—I need not say to you that—have you brought with you——"

"Those valerian pellets you prescribed?"

"No, trunks. Plenty of trunks—costumes—four changes a day. Now, for exercise, that is excellent."

"What are you talking about, doctor?" said Mrs. Montgomery. "If I had not my portable gymnastic apparatus with me I should not be here."

She laughed, while Montgomery, approaching Fargeas, inquired, in a low tone:

"My wife's illness is imaginary, isn't it?"

"Not even imaginary. Only a little nervous malady, which, however, she bears very well."

"And Mrs. Norton?"

"Ah, that is another thing. Have you not noticed her pretty white complexion, the skin fine and velvety looking as if lined with a transparent pink silk?"

"The American women have the finest complexions in the world, doctor."

"Well, the daughters of rheumatic parents alone have as pretty ones. Now Mrs. Norton is really an invalid," said the doctor, who watched Sylvia as he went toward the door.

"Her illness is not imaginary, then?" said Montgomery.

"Well, perhaps imagination may play a part in that illness also. Imagination or—memory."

"Poor Norton!" murmured Montgomery, "he loves her so."

"Oh, there is no danger, be assured. Good-night," said Fargeas, who put on his hat and retired abruptly.

Moreover, the evening was advancing. Since the arrival of Georges de Solis, a sort of peculiar constraint had pervaded the parlors and hovered over Mr. Norton's guests. Miss Arabella stopped playing and was now sitting in a corner, surrounded by her father and mother, who were talking to her in a low voice. Her air was disdainful, and from time to time she cast languishing looks at the marquis and Bernière who were talking with Eva. Offenburger felt inclined to make a tour of the Casino, and Mrs. Montgomery, fancying that Sylvia needed

to be alone, dragged her husband toward the door.

"We shall be in time for the after-piece," she said. "They play a comedy this evening, an unpublished piece. Come, we shall be late."

"I should like it better if it had been published," said Montgomery. "There would be more chance of its not being bad."

However, he allowed himself to be persuaded, and Liliane in passing Sylvia, pressed her hand significantly as if to say:

"Courage!" or "Take care."

Norton had appeared anxious or thoughtful at least, within the last few minutes. It seemed to him that Solis was embarrassed and silent before Sylvia. He had an impression of something vague, indistinct and disturbing in the situation which he could not divine. This impression had neither form nor name, but evidently the arrival of Solis had provoked, perhaps by chance, an unwonted emotion.

And why did these words of the marquis, uttered in the conversation he had recently had with de Solis, return again and again so invincibly to Norton's memory:

"I will never marry an American."

He could only ask himself over and over again, "Why not?"

"Be it so," thought Richard, who was not given to long reveries. "We shall see."

Up to the moment of parting, Solis had exchanged only a few commonplaces with Sylvia. This could hardly have been otherwise, however, as Colonel Dickson, with a persistence worthy of a better cause, had indiscreetly mingled in the conversation.

Offenburger's expressed desire to visit the Casino, and Sylvia's evident indisposition made it necessary to bring the entertainment to a close. Georges excused himself and took his leave as soon as he noticed that the guests were departing. He, also, experienced a sort of oppression—a need to escape—to breathe at his ease.

"Good-night," said Norton.

"Good-night."

"I hope soon to have the honor of seeing Madame de Solis. Give her my respects."

He had held out his hand, and under Sylvia's calm, sweet look, Georges de Solis had taken it—that loyal hand of the husband—with an almost imperceptible hesitation.

Then he turned to Mrs. Norton, bowed, and said simply:

"Madame."

"Monsieur," uttered in a low, almost extinguished voice, was Sylvia's response.

Norton thought them ceremonious to the last degree.

"Oh! no," said he, in his strong voice. "Shake hands in the American fashion," and, anxious to bring those two, who were so dear to him, together, he stood there while Georges and Sylvia clasped each other's hands.

Colonel Dickson looked on, from his interminable height, at this little by-play, whistling softly in his yellow beard, for he remembered very well having seen the Marquis de Solis at Mr. Harley's in New York, and he would have been willing to bet a thousand dollars that Miss Harley was not insensible to the marquis in those days.

"What a simple fellow Norton is," thought the colonel. "Or may be he is not together so *naïf* as he seems."

When Norton was alone in the parlor with his niece and Mrs. Norton he said to Eva:

"What do you think of M. de Solis?"

"I think he is charming," she answered. "It is easy to see that he has traveled in America." The

young girl then held her forehead to her uncle and her hand to Sylvia and added, "Good-night."

"Good-night, dear child."

"You are not suffering really, are you?" said Norton to his wife. And he looked at her with an anxious yearning expression in his eyes.

"No, I thank you. It is nothing. A little fatigue only. To-morrow I shall be all right."

To-morrow! That was precisely the thought, the word which had come into Norton's brain. To-morrow! to-morrow he should know if it were Sylvia who had caused the Marquis de Solis to say, "I shall never, never marry an American."

"You are right, dear Sylvia. Go to bed. I have to work. Good-bye till to-morrow."

On the way to the Casino, where the Dicksons were going to rejoin the Montgomerys, the colonel said to Arabella:

"The marquis is a fine fellow."

"And the viscount is very nice," added the colonel's wife.

"What do you think of them, Arabella?"

"Mamma!"

"I ask you what you think of them."

Then in the night under the mysterious stars, the handsome Arabella said in her musical voice:

“I certainly like the marquis better, but I should be satisfied perfectly with either. I am wholly indifferent.”

“Very well,” said the colonel and his wife in the same breath.

CHAPTER V.

Georges de Solis and Bernière went away alone through the deserted streets. Bernière was smoking a final cigar and breathing the salt air, and in spite of his pessimism, which he carried about with him as conspicuously as the jeweled pin in his scarf, he found a pleasure in walking under the clear sky, studded with stars, on this fine summer night. The two cousins did not talk. Bernière was humming an air from Wagner and the marquis was thinking.

He had just experienced one of the most piquant emotions of his life, though he had so mastered his feelings that none had noticed his agitation. He had not believed it possible that after the lapse of so many years his love for Sylvia could have remained so strong. At best he had not been conscious of it. To him this love was one of those assuaged pains, which had become dear to him and to which he clung as to a memory of some suffering felt a long time, but also long ago ended—a pain which had been mellowed by time into the semblance of a pleasure. And now suddenly all was re-awakened to a fresh life. The dormant agony was making itself felt again in all its intensity.

There was nothing romantic in this meeting. It was very simple that Georges should go at once to visit Richard whom he loved, and Sylvia, having become Norton's wife, it was quite natural that the sentiment of the past should be merged into a sympathy composed of devotion and respect. Life is full of these unfinished romances. But in the first pressure of hands with Sylvia, Solis had felt, almost with affright, an unexpected tremor.

He bore away with him, from this interview with Sylvia, an impression which troubled, which irritated him, and which made him regret, both that he had seen Sylvia again and that he had quitted her so abruptly.

For really he had said nothing to her. And what had she said to him? He might have been a mere chance comer, an indifferent, an unknown, and she would not have accorded to him a different reception.

Yes, but the involuntary trembling of that hand held out to him—that tremor which he alone felt—that instinctive trembling spoke more eloquently than uttered words, and the marquis, after having sought forgetfulness at the ends of the earth, had come back to find himself face to face with this woman whom he had never again expected to see.

Are we sure there is a never in this world where there is no always?

On the way to his lodging Solis was still thinking of Sylvia. She was very pretty. As pretty as when he knew her. Prettier indeed, with her air of suffering, her look of gentle sadness. And what a winning smile! It was exquisitely sweet. He recalled—his recollections were much confused—he knew not what phrase where Shakespeare says, speaking of some one dead, as a supreme eulogy:

“She was sweet.”

“The sweetness, the virtue of the woman;” he thought, almost aloud.

And as if he had been following a similar line of thought, Bernière, who had been humming a tune, suddenly remarked between two puffs of smoke from his cigar.

“These American girls, say what you will, are nice enough to eat.”

“They are very pretty,” said Solis.

“That Miss Dickson for instance. She is too tall, too sculptural, but what a profile she has. What handsome shoulders. She is like a beautiful piece of marble. The banker’s little daughter, so plump, always reminds me of a quail trotting about the feet of a statue. But I like best Norton’s niece.

A saucy minx, that Miss Eva, and cunning and wicked. Ah! these Americans are real women."

A few steps farther on, Bernière threw away his cigar and added:

"Mrs. Norton is the handsomest one of the lot."

"That is my opinion also," said Solis, very coldly.

"A little neuropathic, but Fargeas has made nervous disorders fashionable. It is like the vapors which were so much in vogue in the eighteenth century. It is a malady easily borne and gives one distinction."

"Do not speak of the faults which are fashionable. You, yourself have one which might be mentioned."

"What? Pessimism?"

"Since that is its name, yes."

"Oh! you know I am only a sort of platonic pessimist. There are extremists. I know some people who think the world is all wrong; who declare themselves disgusted with their destiny; who are ready to give up their existence at the slightest provocation, fainting if the soft boiled egg served at breakfast is not absolutely fresh. Pure pessimism is one of the forms of sybaritism. It is the art of maligning life while regaling oneself on

Milanese ragouts. Pessimism especially asserts itself at table between charming women and choice dishes."

"Does not this seem ridiculous to you?"

"No, it seems strange. As long as it lasts, I follow the current, as I follow the fashion in smoking jackets and hats, without exaggeration. But the pessimism which the decadents wear is a hat out of fashion. It is now worn only in the provinces. So you see, I use it at Trouville. In Paris, next winter, we will wear something else. And it will be the same thing identically."

They were walking slowly, finding pleasure in talking, and Solis now tried to prove to his cousin that this affectation of pessimism, this playing at decadentism, at which Bernière himself was ready to scoff, might be pardonable on condition that the comedy come to an end.

"What end?"

"Oh! the simplest in the world. Make for yourself an aim in life."

"I have one—to kill time."

"Work."

"Very well, it is work, and hard work to exist."

"Do not speak nonsense, since you are not given

to committing follies. Do you not think of marrying?"

"And you?"

"Oh! I?" said Solis, whose voice Bernière thought became more serious, "I have my mother."

"And I—I have myself. There is an enormous difference between us," said the viscount. "I do not speak of age. In fact you are younger than I, not only in enthusiasm but in appearance. I am not willing to alienate my liberty as M. Prudhomme would say. While your mother, ah! your mother, poor dear woman, would be so happy to know that you had a fireside of your own, and that you would no more go to dabble in the mud of Tonquin, that you would stay with her and your wife, and that—you know the fairy stories. 'They were happy ever after and had a large family of beautiful children.'"

"I do not believe in fairy stories," said Solis.

"And you are one of the enthusiasts and do not believe in fairy tales." And imitating the tone of one of the actors then in vogue, he went on in his feigned voice: "They do not believe in fairy tales, and we do believe in them, we pessimists, we believe in them only. And there are no more fairy tales? But unhappy one, you perhaps believe in history,

that gigantic lie? You only need to believe in the newspapers to be perfect."

He became suddenly serious after this outburst, and striking his cousin on the shoulder he said:

"How is it possible not to believe in fairies when one sees my aunt? I, who have neither father nor mother, I envy you. And when I say I have no mother I am an ingrate, for she loves me like my own mother. Well, I know what your mother is thinking about and hoping for; perhaps she will not tell it you, but it is to grow old near you, by your side and the side of another and to become a grandmother as in those admirable fairy tales which you despise, sham believer that you are, a paladin who denies chivalry."

Solis stopped and in the clear night tried to make out from Paul's countenance how much there was of seriousness in this confidence.

Then it was true? The marchioness had often spoken to her nephew of her dream—the marriage of her son. She formerly had such ambitions, Georges was well aware of it. But the time had passed. Was she still cherishing such hopes?

"Does she think about your marriage? Why, my dear, she thinks about nothing else. And do you want me to tell you something? Well, it depends

only on yourself if you wish to remain a bachelor. Your mother is studying the young girls as Mrs. Dickson counts off on her fingers the eligible young men. She must have dreamed of fishing for a daughter-in-law at Trouville-sur-Mer."

"You are mad," said Solis.

"That may be, but I am not a fool. Believe me when I say that however little you may be wearied with your nomadic life, if you find a woman who pleases you—I do not refer to Arabella for example, I do not advise you to choose Arabella—you will fill your mother with joy if you ask her to receive her as a daughter. That is my aunt's secret. Perhaps she will not speak to you about it. But I speak to you of it, and I will say further, that if my marriage could bring yours about, I give you my word I would be capable of sacrificing myself and some morning I would go down to the beach and throw my heart into the crowd—not to Arabella, no, Arabella always excepted. Arabella is too handsome for me."

"Take care," said the marquis without responding to the advice of his cousin, "perhaps it is she who threatens you."

"It is possible. Life is so comical. But it would be less comical by the side of this companion in marble."

They had now come to the end of the street and stopped before Madame de Solis' lodgings.

"Good-night, Georges, think of what I have said. It is very serious."

"I will think about it, but my reflections have already been made. I marry? It is too late; I shall never leave the marchioness. The voyages and travels are all ended. I shall grow old in the chimney corner. My poor mother can ask no more."

"Yes, yes, she can. She would like——" And Bernière made with his hand the gesture of stroking the head of a little child.

"Oh!" said Solis, in a voice suddenly become bitter. "Children, for the pleasure there is in living!" The viscount began to laugh heartily.

"Well, this is superb. And you reproach me with pessimism. Why, you are the perfect pessimist, unhappy man!"

"No," said Solis, "on the contrary, there is a blighted love which bears a close resemblance to misanthropy."

"That is to say——"

"Nothing!"

"But you were going to say——"

As Solis did not answer, his cousin bade him good-night laughingly, and added:

"I am going to make a tour of the gaming tables. It is only eleven o'clock. I would be disgraced if I went to bed with the chickens. I will see you on the beach to-morrow."

"Good-night" answered Solis.

The next day brought meetings of the same friends and acquaintances and the same conversations. The same lazy, monotonous life of the seaside was recommenced in which the days succeeded each other in the presence of the marvelous sea, old as creation and yet ever new, in which the elegance of Paris is wedded to the calm, the restfulness of the province.

Bernière found on the sand in the shade of parasols the guests of Richard Norton—the doctor, Georges de Solis, and Mrs. Montgomery, who had just come from her bath. She was radiant in her fresh beauty and with her hair still damp. She gave a salutation to Fargeas, a "my dear marquis" to Solis, and a "good morning, my dear," to the viscount.

"Well," said the doctor, looking at her, "she is brilliant this morning. What a radiant face!"

"Don't speak of it. In taking my bath just now I had a sunstroke."

"For whom," asked Bernière.

Mrs. Montgomery laughed.

“For no one, impudent! And yet, I confess the Prince Koretoff, who waltzed with me yesterday—is charming.”

“Because he is a prince. But you know all Russians are princes!”

“Ah!” said Bernière. “That should not displease the American ladies who would like to be princesses.”

The doctor checked the viscount with a sign—
“If Mr. Montgomery were to hear you.”

“Oh!” said Liliane; “he hears enough about it. He knows my weakness.”

“For the nobility—you have a great respect for titles in America,” and Fargeas shook his head. “Everything which bears a title, not due to money, dazzles you. But do you not know that titles may be bought?”

Mrs. Montgomery had seated herself by the doctor, her red umbrella giving a yet more brilliant tint to her already fresh pink and white complexion.

“Certainly,” she said. “I have a prospectus from Italy. Mr. Montgomery is studying it now — ”

“And where is Mr. Montgomery?”

“What? You ask such a question! Why he is at Deauville, to be sure. Look at your watch. It is the hour of Miss Dickson’s bath.”

“The colonel’s daughter?”

“Oh! the colonel. You know in America the colonels swarm. They tell a story of how the late Barnum, the great showman, wished to exhibit among his curiosities, as one of the most astonishing, an old soldier of the war of secession who did not bear the title of colonel. This phenomenon lived in a remote corner of Florida. When Barnum went to engage him, the famous non-colonel was dead. The story goes that no other specimen was ever found. As to Colonel Dickson, he is only a militia colonel.”

“Then,” added Bernière, “Miss Dickson is the daughter of the National Guard.”

“At any rate she dazzles Europe with her magnificent shoulders. Why, the daily bath of Miss Dickson is an event at Deauville. Omnibuses are loaded with the curious who take this means to arrive in time for the ceremony. Why everybody has shoulders. And if you wished—”

“Oh! Madame, a little charity, please!” said the viscount in a beseeching tone.

“It is Mrs. Montgomery against Miss Dickson,” said the doctor. “The North and the South.”

Bernière added gallantly, “We will be for the Union.”

Then his attention was attracted to a distant group which was advancing along the board walk. First came the colonel, whose long legs gave him the appearance of an exaggerated heron. By his side marched Mrs. Dickson, and between them was the handsome daughter, while a fat, red-faced man dressed in a light gray suit brought up the rear.

"Why, upon my word, there is Miss Arabella. Why how is this? At Trouville at this hour! What will Deauville say? She has not taken her bath then."

"Indeed;" and Liliane leveled her glasses in the direction of the Americans. "Then the reporters must have telegraphed the news to the *New York Herald*. Yes, it is she, and my husband with her."

"Flirting!"

It was indeed Mr. Montgomery, and Miss Arabella was not coming from her bath. She had been sitting for her portrait that morning and Montgomery passing before their hotel, Mr. Dickson had invited him to come in and see the picture, in which Miss Arabella was represented on horseback, on the beach, like Olivares in the saddle. Mr. Montgomery had entered, smiled at the portrait and was making himself generally agreeable when some one named the artist, Edward Harrison. That traitor of a Harrison!

Then Montgomery had brought the Dicksons to Trouville in his carriage. The portrait which was Miss Dickson's sole thought became at once the all absorbing topic of conversation.

"You see, madam, Mr. Montgomery is flirting with Miss Dickson."

"Oh, let him flirt. He is not dangerous," answered Mrs. Montgomery.

"You are right, Miss Arabella," repeated Montgomery, advancing toward the group formed by Liliane, Bernière, the doctor and M. de Solis. "Your portrait, thanks to you, for the artist is only an instrument—your portrait will be an astonishing success. *A chef d'œuvre.*"

"You think so?"

"Almost as pretty as you are."

"Pretty, but dear," muttered the colonel; "devilish dear!"

"Bah! they will pay to see it."

"Why, that is an idea!" said Dickson.

The mother was speaking in a low tone to Arabella, at the same time pointing to the people seated near Liliane.

"I need not call your attention to the fact that the Marquis de Solis is there," she said.

"Very well, mamma."

"And M. de Bernière is sitting near him."

"I see, mamma; but," she had her own opinion, "I like the marquis better."

"Evidently!" retorted the mother.

They were still talking of the portrait, in spite of Montgomery's efforts to change a conversation which was becoming embarrassing to him, when they took their places by the side of Dr. Fargeas and his friends under the great umbrella.

"A portrait! What portrait?" asked Liliane, who had overheard and was very curious.

Arabella answered in a languid voice, lazily letting her words fall, one after another:

"Oh, a portrait of myself, which I am having done for the Mirlitons."

"Who is doing it?" asked Liliane.

Montgomery answered quickly:

"A painter, a bird of passage, at Deauville."

"A bird of passage?" said Arabella, as if wounded. "Mr. Harrison has the finest villa at Deauville."

Liliane repeated to herself: "For the Mirlitons? Harrison? A portrait?"

"Oh! it is only a sketch, a simple sketch," said Montgomery, as if he wished to diminish in some sort the credit of his predecessor.

"Yes," said Arabella, "a sketch merely dashed off, but done with a— a— How shall I say, Monsieur le Marquis?"

And she turned to Solis who had remained silent.

"With a brio—a chic—a dash," she went on accenting these Parisianisms.

"I do not know exactly," said the marquis, beginning to smile.

"Call it dash," said the doctor. "And so it is, this portrait which has hindered you from taking your customary—"

"My bath? Yes; a last sitting. I am tired of posing like this—"

And by the aid of a chair which did duty as a horse, she indicated a pose, a little stilted, the hand holding the reins, the head turned aside and the eye attempting a dreamy expression.

"Oh! how graceful," said Bernière.

"Mr. Harrison has the idea of representing me as a naiad," added the handsome Miss Dickson with perfect simplicity.

"What an excellent idea," said Bernière, while Liliane, with an ironical smile on her lips said:

"As a naiad?"

But the colonel interposed with dignity, "Oh! there are naiads and naiads. An Undine if you

will, but an Undine *comme il faut*—a respectable Undine.”

“Yes,” added the mother, “with enough—”

“And not too much,” completed the daughter.

Liliane leaned toward Bernière and said in a low tone, while a malicious smile revealed her perfect teeth:

“Not too much in the way of drapery, she means.”

The viscount was about to repeat this *mot* for the delectation of the company when the colonel very gravely, and in the manner of a clergyman beginning his sermon, pointed out the sense in which Mrs. Dickson and himself understood the words “enough,” and “not too much.”

“In a portrait,” he said, “as in a conversation, there is a point where propriety ends and the *deshabille* begins. In this the whole art of respectability lies.”

“So,” interrupted Mrs. Dickson, as if she were repeating something she had learned by rote, “with a friend, a relative, a stranger; there is a particular and appropriate degree of respectability to be observed. People who are accustomed to traveling as we are——”

"Do these ladies like excursions?" asked Bernière, addressing the colonel.

The latter answered: "They have traveled a great deal."

"Then," continued Mrs. Dickson, "you can imagine that in the *tables d' hote* one meets all sorts of people, some individualities, in fact, which are not pleasant."

"Types," said Arabella coldly.

"Mrs. Dickson has taught her daughter," the colonel went on, "what pleasantries may be permitted to a stranger, according to his rank or station in society."

"To a cousin by the degree of relationship," said Mrs. Dickson, by way of completing the illustration.

"To her cousin, very well!" interrupted Liliane, "but to her painter?"

Montgomery coughed lightly and came near Liliane's chair, while the colonel's wife whispered to her daughter:

"Do you look out for the marquis."

"Very well, mamma."

"*Her* painter!" said Montgomery, in a low voice, to his wife. "Truly one would say that you are jealous of Miss Arabella."

"Yes, I do not deny it; I am jealous."

"You acknowledge it then!"

"I do indeed. She has had her portrait painted for the Mirlitons, and perhaps for the approaching Salon, as well, by an artist of reputation, of very considerable reputation."

"Oh! artists all have a reputation," interrupted Montgomery.

"Not so much as Harrison," replied Mrs. Montgomery decisively.

"Harrison, Harrison. You are always talking to me of Harrison. It seems to me, that less than any one else, you should——"

He stopped, fearing he might be overheard, and rising, he feigned to observe through his marine glasses, a steamer which was passing at a distance. But while Arabella, following the advice of her mother, was trying to engage in a conversation with Solis, Liliane rose in her turn and said to Montgomery:

"I should what? I ought, I suppose, to cry down Edward Harrison's talent because he was once my husband. The husband has nothing in common with the artist."

"For you possibly. For me, however, the two become confounded, and, when I hear them spoken

of, I can not help feeling a little irritation, easy to understand."

"Then, my dear, you will have to accustom yourself to hearing Edward spoken of. He bears a celebrated name. It is in all the newspapers, I assure you."

"I hope they will not print yours with it," said Montgomery. "They print whatever they please, though. So he has a celebrated name, has he? Well I, too, have a celebrated name."

"With only one *m*."

"The devil! I can not be Montgomery of New York and *Montgommery* of the time of Henry II at the same time. It is not possible I have made a fortune over my counter, and I have not put out the eye of a king of France in a tourney. I have never put out the eye of any one. And it is well, perhaps, for if I had knocked out any one's eye in a tournament the prefect of police——"

He essayed to jest, but Liliane was not in the humor to tolerate his pleasantries.

"You are absurd," she said, "but do you wish to do me a favor and thus make up for some of your shortcomings?"

"Have I many shortcomings?"

"Not many. But to make me forget them I want

you to so arrange that at the next salon, or at Mir-liton's, you understand, by the side of the portrait of Arabella as a *respectable* naiad, there shall be a good one of me as a—goddess."

"As a goddess? By Harrison?"

"By Harrison. He is the only living artist who is capable of faithfully rendering my style of physiognomy. Well, is it a bargain?"

"What?"

"Why, the portrait."

"By—him?"

"By Edward."

"I forbid you to call him Edward," said the now exasperated Montgomery.

With a wheedling, caressing gesture, Liliane stole up to the irate No. 2, softly putting her arm in his and holding her red umbrella over him and said, while she gave him a tender look:

"My dear Lionel—my good Lionel—is not angry with his little wife?"

"Oh! Liliane, Liliane!" Montgomery felt himself weakening. "Well, I will see about it," he said.

"Oh! Lionel," repeated Liliane supplicatingly.

"Yes, yes—I agree—I will write to him. But after this proof—of love, of devotion—of—confidence—of—abnegation——"

"Well, after all that, I will ask other sacrifices in turn. Oh! I shall have my portrait," said Liliane, clapping her hands.

And she turned a little triumphantly toward Arabella.

Montgomery had been thinking deeply in the meantime, and he asked himself the question whether it were quite proper that a divorced husband should be allowed to paint his wife's portrait.

"What shall we do to-day?" asked Arabella, in her strident voice. "Will some one accompany me on my yacht? Will not Monsieur de Solis?"

And as the marquis smilingly bowed his excuses, Bernière advancing said:

"We shall be very happy, Miss Dickson."

Arabella shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Oh, you! You are no sailor. You do not seem to have a pair of sea legs."

"My legs are good enough, but it is the stomach which is unseaworthy. When I am on the water it is apt to turn, you understand?"

"And you become sea-sick?"

"Generally."

At this moment Miss Dickson uttered a joyous little cry, on seeing Miss Meredith, who was coming toward them, with a book under her arm.

"A recruit, bravo!"

Miss Meredith had hardly come within ear shot, when Arabella asked, in the tone of one giving an order:

"You are coming with us, Eva?"

"Where?"

"I do not know. To Honfleur, by sea; anywhere, to England, perhaps."

"No, I shall stay at Trouville. I am not a yachtswoman, like you."

"Indeed!" said Bernière.

"A yachtswoman? Yes," said Colonel Dickson, very proudly. "And a bicyclist, also. She is correspondent of the London Yacht Club, and she won a gold medal at the Dover regatta."

The viscount turned to Arabella, and bowing low, he said:

"My compliments, Miss Dickson."

The handsome Liliane, who had heard, called to her husband, who was talking with Dr. Fargeas.

"What is it, my friend?" asked Montgomery, advancing.

"I want you to find me two sponsors at the yacht club and buy me a yacht. I do not want it to be said that I am not in the movement."

"The devil!" said the little fat man. "If Miss Dick-

son stays a month longer at Deauville, and you imitate all her fantasies—”

“Well, and then?”

“Well, then, I shall be ruined.” Liliane looked at him with an air of contemptuous pity.

“Oh! Mr. Montgomery, I again pardon you for not being one of the *Montgommerys* of France.”

“You pardon me for not having taken my part in the tourney?”

“But take notice, I will not pardon you for being stingy. Go and buy the yacht.”

“Who loves me, follows me,” cried Miss Dickson gaily, while Mrs. Montgomery murmured between her pretty teeth: “Yes, I will follow you.”

“Come, let us start,” said Arabella, turning toward Georges.

“Arabella will play a solo on her violoncello while we are upon the sea,” said the colonel, speaking from the top of his long beard.

“All the talents,” murmured Bernière.

“That might properly be her name,” responded Mrs. Dickson. “She is a bicyclist of the first order; she photographs like Nadar. She has all the accomplishments; yes.”

And “all-the-accomplishments” shot an engaging

glance toward the Marquis de Solis, bent her statue-like neck and cooingly said:

“Are you not coming with us, Monsieur le Marquis?”

“I pray you to excuse me, mademoiselle,” answered Solis. “I am obliged to stay here. I expect some one.”

“In spite of the violoncello?” whispered his cousin Bernière.

Miss Dickson appeared to be slightly piqued at the marquis' slighting reply.

“Ah! so much the worse. I regret it—for us.”

“He is expecting Miss Eva,” said Montgomery to his wife, who, looking at Solis with a stupefied air, could not help saying to him:

“Oh! you are very sly, very sly.”

While the colonel and Dr. Fargeas started off together, Mrs. Dickson said to her daughter in a low tone:

“Take M. de Bernière's arm.” But it seemed that Arabella could not take her blue eyes from the contemplation of M. de Solis.

“Take his arm; I tell you, said the mother rapidly, “we will look out for the hand of the other one later.”

Georges watched the tall girl march off with

Bernière, followed by Mrs. Dickson, who devoured her daughter with her great pale blue eyes and then, turning to Miss Eva who remained standing near him, with the point of her closed umbrella stuck in the sand, and her book under her arm, he said:

“Why did not you go with Miss Dickson’s party? Do these seaside gayeties bore you?”

“No,” said Miss Eva very simply, “I am never bored.”

“Even,” he began to smile, “even when you are not in your free America?”

“Do not laugh, please, I do regret it sometimes,” said Miss Meredith, sitting down. “But not always, no.”

Georges remained standing before her, his hands resting on the back of a chair. With her book lying upon her knees, and the wind toying with her brown hair, which blew about her fine head in beautiful confusion, she lifted her black eyes to his as she said:

“It is pretended that American women have no love for their homes.”

“Yes, it is believed that we all live in hotels and boarding-houses, and that we have no homes as the English have.”

“And you regret your home? Then why did you leave it?”

There was a pretty mocking expression on Eva's face as she answered:

"First, because I was determined to accompany my uncle, whom I love very much. Secondly, because I wanted to be with Sylvia, whose ill-health troubles me not a little, and because I knew that Europe must be seen. But, if I was not tempted to go on Miss Dickson's yacht, I shall be glad, oh! so glad, when I again put my foot on the steamer which is to carry me to New York."

"How about France, Paris, Trouville?" asked the marquis.

"Oh! all very pretty, very pretty. I will be candid. It all pleases me. But it is foreign. Besides, I do not understand how any one can live where he has no memories."

"That is very charming, but not very American."

"Why?"

"An American usually lives anywhere and cares but little what he leaves behind him when he departs. 'Forward—go ahead,' seems to be his motto."

Miss Meredith was turning softly, without reading them, the pages of the book she had brought. She stopped and answered the marquis frankly:

"That is what you were saying a moment ago,

People imagine things. My dear Monsieur de Solis, you may know their language, but you do not know the American women."

"I have seen them in their homes, nevertheless."

"Yes, but you judge of them by the specimens you have seen away from their homes; the American women of Paris for example. But they are a special sort of Americans, not the real, genuine article."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. They are cosmopolitan, after the fashion of Arabella; educated in a Paris boarding; knowing all the *tables d'hote* of Europe; spending the winter in Florence to learn vocal music; in the spring they are at the Bois de Boulogne learning horseback riding; in the summer they are at the seaside for bathing, or are learning to sail a yacht. Sometimes they are in Switzerland, where, resigning the oar for the alpenstock, they scale a peak, as they would sail a yacht or break a horse, capable of going to see the sun rise at Righi after having seen it set at Saint Malo behind the great Bè. They are, if you please, nomadic travelers, whose fireside is a railroad train and whose dwelling is a sleeping car. You must not judge us by these birds of passage. There are others, not so much noticed, who make no noise

in the world and who are content to be happy in their nests."

She had said this so prettily, without affectation, giving to the words, "their nests," an expression of tender sweetness, a sensation as it were, velvety and delicious, so lively was she in her manner, a good humored smile accentuating her light mocking tone, that Solis looked at her, astonished at her logic and charmed with her wit.

"No one could more ingenuously defend his country than you, mademoiselle—"

"Because we have a country; yes, patriots. I am told that you would laugh at a young French girl who would make such a profession of faith."

"Who has told you so?"

"Frenchmen—M. de Bernière, and—"

"My cousin? Do not believe a word he says, especially when he tells you he has no faith in anything. It is his braggadocio style of announcing what he calls his decadentism. And then we Frenchmen have that amiable habit of calumniating each other. It is a form of that patriotism of which you just now spoke. Do not be astonished, then, if we misjudge you, since we are not disposed to do justice to our own people."

"Do you know," said Eva, leaning upon the back

of her chair, "what strikes me most, what embarrasses me—in Paris—in France?"

"What is it, for example?"

Miss Eva's umbrella having fallen upon the sand, he picked it up quickly and handed it to her. While she was opening it he sat down beside the young girl and while waiting for her to speak he felt a pleasure in forgetting Sylvia for a moment, or rather in forgetting to think about her.

"Yes, what is it, mademoiselle, that embarrasses you?"

"It is that I am always afraid I shall not understand your witticisms. You all have too much wit."

"Bah," said the marquis. "Do you think so?"

"I do not speak of you, who never seem to go out of your way to indulge in this current mania for *bon mots*, but of the majority of Parisians who seem to delight in them. It keeps me perpetually on the *qui vive*. It is an annoyance to one who is in the habit of saying things simply and without any attempt at *double entente*. Moreover, one is always afraid of losing a squib. And where there are so many squibs—"

"Then you run away!"

"Well, you see I give you my impressions just as they are."

"You are right in telling them to me."

"Besides, though I saw you for the first time scarcely twenty-four hours ago, it seems that we are old friends. The fact is that I already know you through my Uncle Richard. He loves you so much. He has told me how you saved his life. I thought such things happened only in romances;" and she pointed to the book on her lap.

"I—I saved *his* life?"

"Yes, you."

"Never; it was he—"

"But it is the truth, for he told us. He repeated the story this morning to Sylvia."

"Ah!" said Georges, who suddenly became pale.

"And she was much affected by the story. As he was, as I was. But what is the matter, are you ill?"

Her beautiful black eyes were interrogating Solis who seemed ill at ease.

"Nothing; it is the memory of the event of which you speak."

"Oh!" said Eva. "You are right in loving my Uncle Richard. He is goodness itself. He is devotion personified. He has been so good to his own people. For me he has replaced a dead father, and my mother, the sister of Uncle Richard, had the con-

solation of knowing that when she was gone I should have a home. I love, I adore my Uncle Norton. Truly, I adore him. And it is because I owe his life to you that I like you so much."

The marquis tried to smile a little banteringly.

"Then mademoiselle in this accursed Paris, which is so annoying to you, there is at least one Frenchman whom you are willing to take into your good graces."

She looked the marquis full in the face as if to divine his thought, and then with a charming frankness:

"Oh! there are several. First, there is yourself, then there is Doctor Fargeas who is attending Sylvia with such zeal. Ah! May he cure her quickly and allow us to leave Paris. But if you two were all, you and he, that would suffice to reconcile me to Paris."

"Thanks!" said Solis laughing, "but you have an original way of expressing your friendship for the doctor. My God, grant that I may quit him and Paris as soon as possible. That is your prayer?"

"Yes, that is my thought."

"And when you have gone away, will you not regret Paris?"

"Yes, I said so. Him and you. Bah! America is so near!"

“Yes, you can so easily return to France, you know,” explained Solis.

“No, not at all,” said Eva joyously, “it is so easy to return to New York.”

The marquis found in this pretty American girl, so profoundly a woman, so serious, yet gay as a child—with her sudden sallies, mocking the melancholy reflectiveness of his look—he found in her a singular charm, healthful, penetrating and of a sweet tenderness, the friendly and soothing charm of a being made for the fireside, for the exquisite warmth of peaceful domestic happiness. In her little hand she held an existence of calm, true joy.

And Georges sat there talking, forgetful of the passing time, and yet, with the inveteracy of a fixed idea, thinking of Sylvia, even while contemplating Eva, and comparing the strange, blue, meditative and mournful eyes of the woman, with the clear, black, frank eyes of the girl.

Little by little the conversation flagged. The sun, now approaching the zenith, had lent a scorching fervor to the sand, which sparkled under its burning rays like spangles of fire, and the waves in the distance gave back a blinding glare. Eva, under pretext that the heat was too great, rose and said:

"I am going home. Will you permit me to go alone?"

Solis bowed and rose to accompany her.

"I have not read my book at all. I like stories very much, and yet, it is strange they are all alike."

"That is because they resemble life, which is commonplace."

"Oh! Monsieur le Marquis, I pray you do not let us have any more pessimism. Leave that to M. Bernière."

She was walking by the side of M. de Solis, and as she spoke she laughed merrily. "M. Bernière is very amusing," she went on, "but he would make me tired in a little while. He is a Schopenhauer of the boulevard. He should be referred to Mademoiselle Offenburger."

"And Mademoiselle Offenburger would be very capable of keeping him," said the marquis, "which would be a great pity, by the way."

"Why?"

"Because my cousin is a good fellow at bottom."

"Well, is not Mademoiselle Offenburger a charming young woman?"

"Yes, she is charming. If an encyclopedia could walk, it would be charming also."

“Then you do not like learned women?”

“On the contrary. But I do not like an ostentatious display of learning. You may be as learned as Mademoiselle Offenburger, but you do not proclaim it from the housetops.”

“Because I do not know anything. I have a diploma from a cooking-school and I might aspire to a professorship in ironing. Yes, I iron all my collars myself. It amuses me. But that sort of accomplishment does not count.”

“I see,” said M. de Solis. “If Molière were here he would not hesitate.”

They had come upon a sort of pool or rivulet formed by the water sent up by the sea at high tide, and which had been left in the hollows in the sand. Eva stopped and examined the puddle carefully, as if to decide whether she could leap over it without wetting her shoes. M. de Solis held out his hand to her.

“Do not be in a hurry,” he said; “be careful where you step.”

“Bah! What if I should wet the ends of my shoes?”

“This way, madame,” cried a chorus of childish voices. “Here is a bridge.”

It was true. Over the little pool of sea water

some boys and girls, *gamins* and *gamines* of the beach, *gavroches* of the sea, had put some planks, supported by sand heaps, imitating in their construction the abutments of bridges, over which promenaders might safely pass.

"If there isn't a bridge! Let us go by the bridge," said the marquis gaily.

The gamins disputed possession of the passengers, like so many porters disputing for the baggage of a trader at a railway station.

"This way, monsieur! Here, madame! Take mine, take mine. Mine is the best."

Solis had already passed over one of the little bridges, and now offered his hand to Eva, who said, "Thank you," and passed over in her turn.

As the marquis was giving some sous to a boy of thirteen or fourteen years, who stood on the other side of the little pool, at the end of his bridge, Miss Meredith was attracted by the appearance of the lad. His hair was of a light straw color, and fell in straight masses on both sides of his face, fresh and red, though much tanned by the sun and the sea air.

At the same time, the boy recognized the American girl, and with cap in one hand, while with the other he fumbled in his pocket, where rested the sous just given him by the marquis, he said:

"Ah, mademoiselle, I was going to your villa at high tide."

"Oh! one of your acquaintances, I see!" said the marquis.

The boy nodded, and looked at Eva with his clear blue eyes, in which shone the grateful expression of a devoted dog.

"Mademoiselle? Indeed I know her. But the other one, where is she?"

Georges had no need of asking the boy the name of that "other," and in his heart he named her—Sylvia. He divined the visits of charity and kindness which she had made to these poor people.

In the meantime, the boy was pulling from his pocket a package wrapped in a piece of newspaper, which he carefully unfolded, as if it contained some precious object, and handing to Miss Eva a gold bracelet, from which hung a broken chain, he said:

"Here is a bracelet some one dropped at mamma's yesterday. It belongs to mademoiselle or the other."

"It is Sylvia's," said Miss Meredith, taking the bracelet.

"How did Mrs. Norton lose it at this child's house?" asked the marquis.

Eva laughed—"Oh! we have our little secrets."

"The ladies came to see how mamma, who is sick, was getting on," said the boy with a knowing air in response to the marquis' question. "And yesterday—"

But Eva interrupted the boy, wishing to give him the pleasure of restoring the bracelet to Sylvia, himself:

"Follow us, my child."

With the marquis she took the road to the villa, while the gamin, walking by her side, explained in his Norman patois, the life they led in the fisher's hut where the American ladies came sometimes, the young lady there and the *other*.

There had been hard times that winter at Ruaud's. The father had lost his brother who was drowned at sea, near Ostend. They had been associated in the fishing, the two brothers. And the mother was sick, too, and for a long time had been suffering and moaning with a fever. The boy earned a few sous each day, with his bridges over the little pools of breakwater at the beach during the bathing season. In the winter he went to school. When he should be grown up, he would be a sailor like his father, a sailor first, and a fisherman afterward, like all his family.

During the recital of this humble story they reached the Norton villa, and Eva having inquired if Mrs. Norton was at home, said to the little Ruaud, "Come and let the 'other' thank you; enter also, M. de Solis."

Georges hesitated. It seemed to him that he would be committing an indiscretion in coming back to Mrs. Norton's so soon. Yet why should he hesitate since he was merely accompanying Miss Meredith. Should he not serve in his quality of attendant cavalier as far as the parlor?

Sylvia was at home in the same room where, on the preceding evening, Georges de Solis had found her; where, as if across a chasm formed by the years, she had held out to him the hand of a friend. She seemed glad that he had come.

"Welcome," she said. "I was afraid that your wild life acquired by so much travel among the people of Tonquin and Anam might have—"

She stopped suddenly, fearing she had said too much. She tried to smile, but it was with less assurance than she would have liked to display. She explained to herself, by what she felt, the apparent eagerness of M. de Solis. Why should he have come again so soon, so quickly? And was she now going to live near him and see him frequently?

"My dear Sylvia, another time fasten your bracelet more securely. See what the little Ruaud is bringing you," said Miss Meredith.

The child, who was looking about him, with his astonished blue eyes, seeming to regard the room with the respect due to the splendors of a church, turned quickly on hearing his name.

"Yes, it appears that it is your bracelet, madame," he said to Sylvia. "It must have become loosened while you were talking to the mother. It was father who found it at the foot of the bed when he came in from the fishing and said 'Francis, take that back to the American ladies as quickly as you can. They may need it when they go to the fête.'"

The clear, ringing laugh of Miss Meredith interrupted the poor boy.

"To the fête!" said the girl. "Ah! how amusing."

Francis Ruaud looked a little confused when he heard Miss Eva laugh. He feared he had said something very foolish.

But Sylvia quickly reassured him: "Your father is a good man. Please thank him for me. My bracelet——"

She took it from Eva's hand and tried to fasten it upon her wrist.

“Will you permit me?” said M. de Solis, mechanically.

“Can you?”

“It is—it is a little difficult,” said the marquis, whose fingers were touching Sylvia’s soft skin. “It is pretty, finer than the coarse English or Anglo-American jewelry so much worn by your country women.”

“Thanks,” interrupted Eva. “Thanks for myself, I have one of those horrors you speak of; I wear some of that coarse jewelry myself.”

She showed the marquis a heavy golden chain on her wrist with a small padlock and a bunch of keys for a fastening.

“I beg your pardon, I did not see——”

Georges stammered, while Miss Meredith added without any malice:

“We see what we are looking for.” And approaching Sylvia she said:

“You will never succeed, Monsieur de Solis. Let me do it. Your hand trembles. Besides, you see, the chain is broken.”

Sylvia, a little pale, had thanked M. de Solis, and not knowing what to say, while Miss Meredith was fastening her bracelet, she asked Francis:

“And how is your mamma?”

“Not very well, thank you. Her back is very lame, after the fever. She got a sprain while helping father turn the capstan. She says it will be nothing. But she cries all the time, and that worries papa.”

“Oh, poor man,” said Eva.

Little Francis shook his head with a serious air, and a sad, thoughtful expression passed over his handsome, open, childish face.

“Papa says he must have sleep if he gets up so early in the morning for the fishing, and if he passes a sleepless night he is so ill-tempered. And then he is so cross to poor mamma.”

“Poor woman,” said Sylvia.

“And is he cross to you also?” asked Eva.

“Oh! yes, he is hard on me, too. He can not help it, I suppose. He was made that way. He is a hard man. And when he is at his worst——”

“At his worst?” asked Miss Meredith. “What is that?”

The child looked at the young woman. He twirled his cap in his fingers, and an embarrassed, almost melancholy smile crept over his face.

“Oh, I mean when he has had a drop or so too much. Then——”

“Well, what happens then?” said the marquis.

"Nothing, monsieur, only he is not always pleasant."

"Well, after that?"

"Oh! dear, there are blows. They are thick as rain. He strikes if one speaks a word."

"He strikes your mamma, does he?" asked Sylvia.

"Yes, but he hardly knows what he is doing when he is drinking. He is a little off" (and the child touched his forehead significantly). "Yes, he is a little off, not *chic* you know."

In this little word of slang, spoken in a low voice and with a solemn shake of the head, there was a volume of meaning, of childish tears repressed, and of long, long hours of sadness.

"You love your mother, do you not?"

"Why of course," said the boy. "It is mamma."

"And your father?" It was Georges who asked the question.

"I love him, too," answered the child.

"In spite of his—"

"*Dame!* He is my papa."

"What is your first name?"

"Francis—Francis Joseph Ruand."

"How old are you?"

The boy made a mental calculation:

"Let me see—twelve—thirteen. I was twelve years old last herring catch."

"Then you are about thirteen," said Eva.

"In that neighborhood," said the child seriously.

"And you want to be a sailor?" asked Sylvia, who spoke as familiarly with him as did the others.

"Yes, I told the young lady and the gentleman just now that I would like to be a sailor, not a marine on board a war vessel, but a sailor in the coast trade."

"Why?"

"On account of my parents."

"Your father?" asked Georges.

"And my mother. I should like to live near them and to give them a part of my earnings. You know I earn a little now but I am ambitious."

"You are ambitious?"

"Yes," said the boy proudly, "I want to earn more than that."

"How much do you earn?"

"Sometimes as much as six sous a day."

"How much?" asked Sylvia, touched by the story of such poverty.

"Six sous, sometimes, but seldom eight or ten."

"And your father, how much does he earn?"

"Oh! he earns more, only as his boat has no

cover, a poor old boat, and as he has to buy bait—the fish are very particular and must have fresh bait—why there is not much profit at the end of the count.”

“And yet your cousin Bernière, at baccarat in one night, lost—Oh, I wish M. de Bernière were here,” said Miss Meredith.

“And you manage to live on these small earnings?” said Sylvia.

“Oh, sometimes there is a windfall. When father catches a fine cod, or takes a turtle—then there is soup—on Sunday—”

“Soup is an event then,” said Georges.

The child smiled.

“Well, Francis,” said Mrs. Norton, “here is something for you—for finding the bracelet, you know.”

And she held out to the boy a piece of gold, which he took joyfully in his chubby, chapped hands, while his face suddenly became very red. For a moment he held it with an avaricious grasp, then handing it back to Sylvia, he stammered:

“Oh, madame. It is too much. It was no trouble to bring back the bracelet, I did not do it for pay.”

“I know it well, my child. But I want your mother to be able to care for herself as she needs. It is for her.”

"Thanks for mamma then," said the little one.

"And I want you to bring me news of her, you understand. Come back often, often, my child."

"With pleasure, madame. When I do not have to make bridges, or when the nets are drying; otherwise papa—" and smiling he made the gesture of an uplifted arm in the act of striking. "Good-bye, monsieur, madame and the company. And if you are not here when I come again to the villa, I will ask monsieur where you are," he added, jerking his thumb in the direction of Georges de Solis.

"Why ask monsieur?" asked Eva, amused.

Francis saw he had made some blunder, and said to Sylvia:

"Is he not your husband?"

"What an idea!" said Eva.

"Pardon—excuse me—I thought—" An awkward silence suddenly filled the room. Eva and Sylvia looked at each other in evident embarrassment. The latter lowered her eyes in an almost painful confusion, while Francis Ruaud asked Miss Meredith:

"How shall I go out of here? I do not know the way."

"I will show you," said Eva.

The boy, still saluting Mrs. Norton and the mar-

quis, went out with Miss Meredith, leaving M. de Solis alone with Sylvia—alone in the room where the fisherman's boy had touched without knowing it, unconscious of the martyrdom he was inflicting, the wound of those two beings condemned to suffer.

CHAPTER VI.

They were alone, face to face; alone, after years; alone, after the separation of their two existences, their double life having continued at the caprice of destiny, with oceans and space for a separating barrier. They were alone, and a painful timidity came over each of them, as if each were afraid of saying too much in the first word, about to be pronounced.

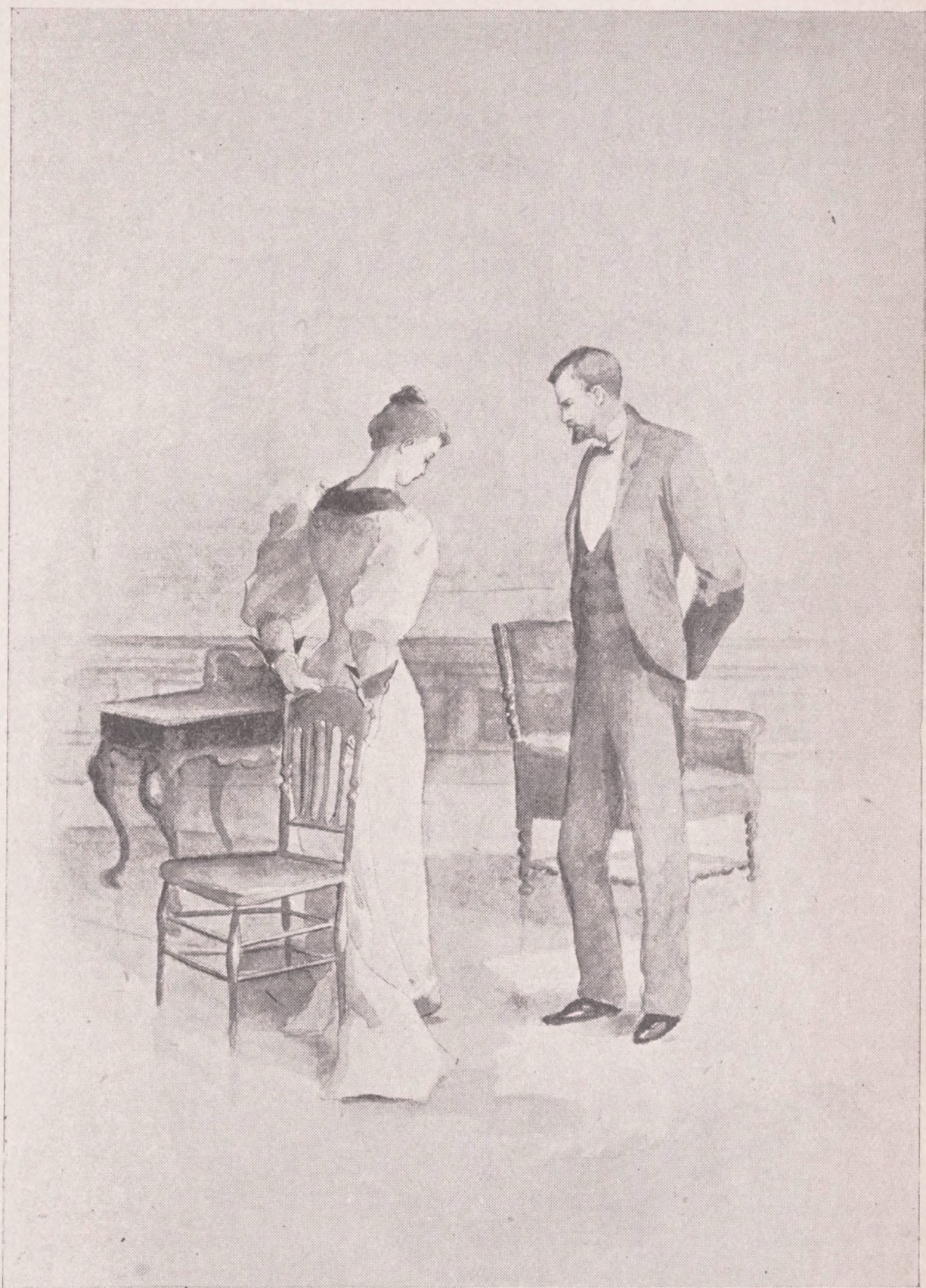
Norton was in his office at Havre, sending his instructions to New York. But neither Sylvia nor M. de Solis thought of Norton. They were thinking only of their past, of that dear, nameless past, of what had been taken out of their destiny, of all that might have been, but was not, and never would be.

At first, not a word was spoken by either. Then, after a moment of mute, sad contemplation, Georges broke the silence, saying:

“You must confess that there are strange chances in life.”

“Yes?” said Sylvia, interrogatively, as if she did not divine his allusion.

“For example, that poor boy could not suspect what memories he would awaken by his awkward remark.”



THEY WERE ALONE, FACE TO FACE.

“What memories?” She saw that Solis was on the point of speaking confidentially of the past, and she wished to avoid it.

“What memories? Have you forgotten them?”

“I do not say that,” replied Mrs. Norton, coldly, “but I know that it would be cruel to recall them. And what good will it do to speak of them?”

“I ask pardon for making allusion to them. I may say, almost involuntarily, but that child——”

Solis shook his head and continued:

“There is nothing like innocent hands to make us suffer, without intending it.”

Sylvia tried to smile. “Bah!” she said. “You are certainly not unaware that existence is a series more or less long, of sufferings more or less consoled.”

He caught eagerly at the word:

“Consoled? You have used a word almost as painful to me as the mistake of little Francis Ruaud.”

“Painful? Why?” asked Sylvia.

“Because I am not one of those who can be consoled.”

M. de Solis put such a painful accent of sincerity into his words that the honest woman responded sadly, but with a forced, and as it were, implacable tenderness, as if to make him understand that all was finished, past, fled:

"We must, however, dear marquis, take life as it is, neither as a farce nor yet as a tragedy—a little dull, a little gray, like the sea to-day, yet having this good quality in it, that each day it bears us nearer our destiny, as each wave yonder carries away some debris deposited upon the beach."

"Then," said Solis, in a low tremulous tone, "all that has been in the past is gone, vanished forever?"

"Why do you ask me that?" said Sylvia. "It is not well that you should seek to know what may have remained in a woman's heart. I have never forgotten you. You know me well enough to understand that I am as faithful to an affection as to an oath. But in the presence of Richard Norton's wife, you must forget that you once dreamed of giving her another name. Fate has willed it otherwise. My father advised—exactd—this marriage. He saw in it every promise of future happiness for me—a husband devoted, courageous and good; and you will agree," added the young woman, "that my poor father might have made a worse choice."

"There is no man in the world whom I love more deeply than Richard Norton," Solis answered. "But you will pardon, for the sake of my friendship, the questions, which now come to my lips every time I see you. Have the promises of happiness which

your father foresaw for you, been fulfilled? I repeat, madam, that it is one of the most faithful and respectful of your friends, who now speaks to you. I confess that I feel anxious and unhappy in seeing that you are sad. And in spite of what you have just said, each wave over-yonder does not carry away all its debris. No, no. There will be left a remnant on the sand. There will remain something in our hearts."

"No one is to blame," said Sylvia incisively. "If I am not well, I must look to Dr. Fargeas to cure me. The balance of the world have nothing to do with it."

"Then you are happy?"

He regarded her a little anxiously, wishing for and at the same time dreading her answer.

"I am happy, perfectly happy," she said without any appearance of constraint, or of insincerity.

The voice of Solis sounded hollow as he went on:

"I am glad to have this assurance from yourself. It consoles me somewhat in my turn. I shall have more courage to be resigned—"

"To be resigned?"

"Ah!" he said with sudden energy in which there was the slightest tinge of reproach. "Every one can not so easily encounter that happiness of which you

speak. Others, to find the forgetfulness which awaits you at your fireside traverse the universe and wear away their lives to escape a memory which follows them everywhere. They imagine that the being, whose loss they regret, suffers the same pangs, and experiences the same agony as themselves, in the memory of vanished dreams. Ah! Yes! Chimerical spirits! Hunters of romance! Simple hearts! And some fine day they again meet the being from whom they have madly fled, and dreading to find in the dear remembered one a sadness, a melancholy equal to their own, they encounter instead a grief which has been consoled, a resignation which has become a happiness. For those who have been faithful to the ideal of their past, but one thing remains to take up the line of interrupted travel, to go on forever, and at last to disappear. Perhaps they, too, may some time be able to throw off by the wayside the clinging burden of their first dream."

"To this sudden and bitter burst on the part of Solis, Sylvia, whose sad, sweet look enveloped him like a soft reproach, said:

"You told me a moment ago that you were my most devoted friend. Does a friend speak as you have done? With what, after all, shall I reproach myself? For having accepted life as it is? I do not

call that resignation, as you would have it, but duty. You are right, Georges," (he trembled at hearing that name of former days), "the best thing you can do at present is to go away and leave me in peace, in the sadness or joy of my new life. Every word that you might say to me would be painful, and in spite of what you may believe, the memory of our poor dreams of the past is so vivid in my thoughts that your presence revives regrets which I thought had been forever effaced."

"Regrets?"

"You well know," she said, affecting not to notice the note of hope in the exclamation of Solis, "that the least word between us is cruel. You said you would be willing to resume your life of travel. Be it so, and I will thank the fate which has permitted me to come to France to see you once more, to beg you to forget me, but this time once for all—once for all."

"To leave you again?" he cried. "Can I do it, Sylvia? To forget you? Never!"

"Well, at least do not say so to me. It makes me think that you take pleasure in afflicting me. Keep from me the secret of your affection, as you have kept the affection itself, locked in your own heart. Allow me to believe that you can efface from your

heart that which is most deeply graven there. Make for yourself a new life, my friend, worthy of yourself, of your courage, of your talents. In a word, you, who reproached me with being happy, try to be happy yourself;" and she added, trying to smile, but not succeeding:

"That is all; I wait to be consoled."

Solis could only reply by a cry, a despairing cry of love:

"Happiness! There is no happiness, except with you."

"No," said Sylvia, trembling violently. "I assure you, you will find it elsewhere. There must be some happiness remaining. I have dispensed so little."

The melancholy tone in which these last words were spoken made the young man's nerves vibrate, and taking Sylvia's hands, he said in a burst of devoted tenderness:

"Ah! you really suffer!"

"Selfish one," she said, softly, "do you think that you alone have the right to suffer?"

She had in her smiling resignation betrayed at last the real state of her heart. But by a sort of chance, or fear, she quickly recovered possession of herself, and withdrawing her hands from those of Solis, and in order to cut short these confidences

which were oppressive to her, and which were impelling her to the brink of memories which would be painful to her, she began to talk of other subjects—of the sea, of Mademoiselle Offenburger, of whatever was commonplace, current gossip, the conversation of the neighborhood. But the thoughts of M. de Solis were elsewhere. He did not listen to what was said, answered mechanically, and yet he felt happy to be near her, wrapped as he was in the soothing torpor of his dream.

They were in the midst of this futile conversation in which words were used to mask their real feelings, when they heard Norton's step. They felt no sensation of fear or annoyance when Richard entered. On the contrary, his arrival delivered them from an embarrassment which was becoming agonizing. They had felt that through the empty sentences of their recent conversation there were rising to the surface passionate avowals, unspoken tendernesses, and neither he nor she wished to succumb to them. Therefore, Norton's coming was welcome to both.

He seemed careworn, moreover, and Sylvia thought he looked very pale. A good-humored smile, however, illuminated his strong face when he held out his hand to his friend, and then he asked

Mrs. Norton if she were not better, and if Dr. Fargeas were not satisfied with her progress.

"I have not seen the doctor to-day."

"So much the better, my dear. That shows that he is not disturbed about your condition."

They talked for some moments longer on indifferent subjects, Mr. Norton seeming, however, to be vaguely anxious about some mines, which he did not name. Then Sylvia asked of M. de Solis permission to retire. She was a little tired, she said, and then she would see the marquis again soon. In taking her leave there was in her manner a graciousness, a melancholy full of hidden meanings which Georges understood, and which, if expressed in words, would have said:

"Yes, we loved each other once, but now behold the husband whom I must reverence and adore."

Solis understood all this perfectly. He watched her as she took her leave, with the impression that the tender words they had exchanged that morning could have no other effect than that of establishing the cruelty of this reality; all his dreams came brutally in contact with this solid fact and were shattered there. He seemed to have fallen from some dream-created height and found himself, on

awakening, before the husband, that living obstacle, that rival who was his fraternal friend.

In spite of his own suffering, which gave him the egotistic right to think only of himself, Georges noticed a sort of nervousness and uneasiness on the part of Norton. Had some harassing complication arisen in America? Involved in so many diversified interests, Norton was like the general of an army, exercising a surveillance over troops engaged in many parts of the field at the same time. The American must have been preoccupied by some material interest, but at the first question of the marquis, Richard responded quickly, that it was not business matters which concerned him at the moment. He had not the slightest concern in that direction.

“What is it then?” asked Solis.

“My dear friend,” said Norton, “it is absurd enough; and for a man of my physique, it may seem to you to be ridiculous, but the fact is, I am becoming nervous. I, also, am in the fashion. The great nervous disease you know. I suppose I am doomed to become one of Dr. Fargeas’ patients. Yes, I, the Yankee, the man of granite, the machine-man; I have nerves.”

He laughed a harsh, unnatural laugh. “I do not sleep any more. It is nonsensical, and in my sleepless hours I imagine hosts of unpleasant things.”

"You have nothing to make you uneasy?" asked Georges.

"I have said that my health is not good," said Norton. "Since I came to France I have experienced a sort of crisis. I have said nothing of it to Mrs. Norton, because I did not want to alarm her, nor to give myself the appearance of a nervous schoolma'am, with my bulk of an American ox. But the fact remains the same. Have I worked too hard, over-excited my nerves? It may be so. What is certain is, that my insomnia is crushing me, to speak in the manner of Offenburger. At best I have only sleep interrupted with dreams. My brain is in a whirl and my thoughts gallop through space like Mazepa's steed, while the body dozes. I have a ringing in my ears like that far-off sound of bells. In short, I am beginning to experience a marked feeling of lassitude. The loss of sleep irritates me, and it has taken a good deal of determination to enable me to deny myself the use of chloral which makes me sleep at night, but stupefies me the following day. To avoid this alternative I lie awake and think. The nights pass, but in these half-waking, half-sleeping watches, sad, absurd ideas weary my brain and take entire possession of me. I beg pardon for speaking of all this to you, my dear Georges, I who used to

preach to you to substitute action for day dreaming and laugh at the blue devils. I must unbosom myself. I must talk. I must throw to the winds of friendly confidence that which chokes, which stifles me. My body is here, but my thoughts are yonder in America. I work like a negro. The existence of all those workmen, miners, merchants, ship owners, railroad engineers and firemen is dependent upon mine. All this engrosses my attention. And yet I am afraid of one thing."

"What is that?" asked Solis.

Norton paused. Then nervously, as if some interior impulse constrained him to avow what was really the great anxiety of his life, he said:

"Well, I am afraid I have sacrificed my personal happiness to give bread and life to all these people."

"Your happiness?"

It was the same word, pronounced but a few moments before by the wife, which was now heard from the lips of the husband. Happiness! Eternal word of humanity, constantly enamored of this dream; the cry of agony of all mankind, the despairing call toward the promised land, the realm of the unseen. Happiness!

"Yes," said Norton, "I am not happy, and all because Sylvia is unhappy."

At the name of the young wife nervously pronounced by the husband, Solis felt a sudden, painful contraction of the throat. He would have the conversation stop there, for he began to be embarrassed by the too intimate avowals of his friend. There was about this interview, which had been, as it were, forced upon him, something of the solemn and unexpected, and it troubled and irritated the young man.

“Why should not Mrs. Norton be happy?” he said in a tone of studied calmness, for he wished to cut short a silence which was becoming painful. Norton was in a reverie and was regarding, but without seeing them, the sea and the distant horizon. “She has everything to make her perfectly happy. What you fear must be in your imagination. You love her, do you not?”

“With all my heart.”

“And she loves you?” Georges went on in a lower voice.

Norton did not at once answer, but began to pace up and down the apartment, his vacant stare mechanically fixed upon the carpet.

“My dear friend,” he said suddenly, breaking the silence, “you never know whether a woman loves you or not—or rather you can tell, if you are neither a

fool nor a fop, that she no longer loves you, or will no longer love you, even though she thinks, perhaps, in good faith that she still loves you. You remember Miss Harley? You do not think Sylvia has changed?" he asked, with a sad attempt at a smile.

"No, I think Mrs. Norton is the same. She is unchanged."

"Well, she is not only ill, but unhappy. I am certain of it."

"She expected of life a happiness, which it has not brought her. And then the man she married was an entirely different being from the person I have become. It is in vain that I have given myself to her. I owe myself also to those who depend upon me in America. She loved me, but she loves me no longer."

He did not realize what torture he was inflicting upon Georges. It seemed to Norton that there was a certain satisfaction in unbosoming himself, in exposing his wound and in probing it to the bottom. He had that satisfaction which sick persons have, who aggravate their sufferings by dwelling upon them with a morbid sort of pleasure.

Besides, in whom should he confide, if not in that friend, younger than himself, but of whose loyal affection he was sure. And then he did not reason.

He did not calculate. Nervously he allowed himself to be impelled to these confidences. He emptied his heart of all its secrets with a bitterness which relieved and consoled him.

No, Sylvia no longer loved him. He was certain of that. The vague melancholy, the meditations of the young woman, her nervousness which resisted even the skill of Dr. Fargeas, left him in no doubt. He had condemned her to a life which lay heavily upon her shoulders.

"Whatever I may do, one day of our existence resembles all other days. It is the monotony of labor. I give you my word, there are times when I feel that I would willingly throw off the burden of all this business, and I am egotist enough to say, I would try to live only for her and myself."

"Well," said Solis firmly, "why do you not do it?"

"Why?" Norton shrugged his shoulders. "Ask my miners, my laborers, the people on my ranches, if they do not need me as badly as I need them."

"No doubt of it at all; but the mines once sold, a new director would provide for the miners as well as you have done."

There is some question of that. I have buried enormous sums of money in their development, which is a difficult thing. A newcomer might proceed to

put on foot some economic reforms, and in that case there would be more than one family among my good workmen who would have no soup for the evening meal."

"Then you are remaining in a business you do not like, for philanthropy's sake?"

"Out of a sense of duty. I feel that a great bunch of humanity is hanging to me, as to a parent stem. This sensation gives me pleasure."

And with uplifted head, the American drew himself up proudly, as if he felt the lines by which he was attached to these thousands and thousands of people whose source of life he was.

"I have a pride in being the distributor of bread to such a mass of people. It is not an embarrassment. I have found people here who are quite ready to divide my mission and share my responsibility."

"Offenburger?" asked M. de Solis.

"Offenburger, precisely."

"I would have laid a wager that it was he. The banker must needs get scent, not of the philanthropy, but of the gold there is in any undertaking, before he puts a finger in it. He is a sly rogue."

"But a good man at bottom. Infatuated with the passion of money getting, a little puffed up with his own vanity, but not bad. He thinks you are very

estimable, I may say by way of parenthesis. By the way, if you would like to marry, there is a chance. Helene is pretty enough, I think—”

“She is very pretty, but she has too great faults. She is too rich—”

“That is a fault which can be condoned.”

“And too learned.”

“She belongs to her epoch.”

“Then I should have liked better to have lived in the time of her mother, who must have been very pretty, if the daughter is like her. What a queer thing affiliation is! The father, Offenburger, is a Hamburger and a Jew; the mother was an English Protestant. What is she, the young lady, Helene?”

“A Catholic.”

“Exactly! The hotch-potch of actual society.”

He was still endeavoring to smile, feeling a strong desire nevertheless to fly, not knowing how to ward off the heart-breaking confidences of this husband whose affection went out to him naturally. He forced himself to inject into the conversation ironical pleasantries which, however, came only from the lips and not from the heart. He felt strangely troubled when Norton suddenly, and as if moved by some instinctive impulse seized his hand and said in a hard, dry voice:

“In fact you are right. Do not marry. There are too many sorrows in this voyage made by two people, where one leaves the other *en route*. When one feels that he is loved with a true love, nothing can equal the suffering of that one of them who at a given moment divines that he is no longer loved, that all is finished for him, that the thought of the beloved one wanders elsewhere, that the adored one loves another. Well, my dear, I am in that situation. You see what is in my heart. And that is why I cry out in my anguish, that is why I am ready to break my head against the wall.”

Solis felt the burning pressure of the fingers of this man, who seemed shaken with a nervous fever. He also had felt a shock like the sudden benumbing effect of an electric current, when Norton, beside himself in the madness of his suffering, had uttered this confidence, hot as a spurt of life blood:

“Another! when the adored one loves another!”

It was as if a flash of lightning had zig-zagged before his eyes, and his startled exclamations, while intended for consolation, were a lie both to Norton and himself.

“Oh, no! What you are saying is merest folly. Mrs. Norton loves no one but you.”

In hearing the sound of his own voice, he had

experienced a sensation which he was unable to analyze, even in his trouble. It seemed that he had answered too hastily, eagerly even, and that in speaking his voice trembled as if the lie were visible. He loved her. He loved that Sylvia whose lost love Norton regretted. And would not his startled cry of attempted consolation betray this love?

"I do not say that Mrs. Norton is not one of the most honest women in the world," answered the husband, with his bitter appetite for confidences. "I say that she is escaping from me, who am the reality in her life, into an existence of dreams, of reveries, of romance. The 'other' of whom I speak I do not mean to say has even an existence; but what I do know, what I feel, and what tortures me is, that I am no longer alone in Sylvia's thoughts; that her life has resolved itself into a disappointment; that I who adore her so much, that it is a joy to me even to talk about her to you, I am unhappy enough to cry out in my agony and she to weep in silence. And this is life, my friend. And there are people who will commit cowardly and dishonorable deeds to preserve it."

Solis was frightened at this state of mind, at this suffering of his friend, who, with a singular acuteness of perception, was reading his wife's heart as if

it had been an open book, and who was speaking of that "other" whom his wife might love—of whom? of the other, of him, of Solis, of him who was loved by Sylvia yesterday and who, to-morrow, would rob Richard of her love.

He experienced a feeling of extreme embarrassment. He would have been glad to stop Norton in his confessions, and yet he could not help feeling a sentiment of triumph in hearing him speak in this manner of Sylvia. He saw her in his imagination while her husband was speaking, with her sad and gentle air, and he could fancy he heard her avow her love for himself. This thought gave him a shiver, almost of terror. He asked himself if, by any possibility, Norton, who, however, could not have suspected anything, might not wish to penetrate his secret in avowing his own. But Norton was incapable of such Machiavelism. It was the inner suffering of the man which alone impelled him to lay open his heart, as if, by unsealing the springs of his bitterness, all his sorrows might escape through the fissure.

Georges took the wise course of concealing his emotion and again tried, laughingly, to reassure Norton. There was no cause for alarm! Richard was exaggerating! His condition of mind pointed

out phantoms where none existed! How was it possible for Mrs. Norton not to be happy in the life he had prepared for her, and loved as she must know herself to be loved by him.

"Do you care to have me tell you the plain truth?" asked Solis. "Well, then, you are unjust to your fate. You are complaining because you are too happy."

"I know what I am saying. But after all, what? We must accept things as they are. I ask pardon, however, for having annoyed you with what you call my phantoms."

"No, not annoyed," said Georges, "but saddened."

"It is about the same thing. Therefore, I hope you will excuse me, my dear friend. I now have my correspondence to attend to. Some letters to write, as they always say in your comedies. Forget my verbosity. Ordinarily, I am not so talkative. But to-day I was betrayed into it. I repeat, pardon me. It is always wrong to talk too much."

"Even to a friend?" said M. de Solis, in a constrained tone.

"Oh, my dear, when we confide to a friend who does not love us we annoy him, but if to a friend who loves us, then we sadden him. Good-bye until

to-morrow;" and he extended his hand, which, strange to say, his friend the marquis hesitated to grasp.

CHAPTER VII.

Georges de Solis returned to his apartments and passed a feverish night. He debated with himself what course he should now pursue. Eager to depart on new voyages in search of the river of forgetfulness, he found himself between these two beings, one of whom—that one whom he loved as a brother—had just shown him a deep and poignant grief like a concealed wound. And by the untowardness of fate, it was he who had caused all this grief, of which indeed he was suffering his share. What ought he to do? Ah! if it were not that the dear woman, who lived only by his life, was there near him, he would have resumed his existence full of hazard, of adventure, shaking off his sorrows in the jolting of the road, as one might scatter a bag of sharp-cornered stones to be worn smooth by usage. To go away! It was the only clearly defined thought which came to his mind, whether he lay stretched upon his bed, or rose to look out the windows at the sea, swelling in the distance under the bright moon.

Yes, to go away! That is what wisdom dictated,

even in the disarranged state in which his reason was. The vast world still held solitudes for souls hungry for forgetfulness, like himself, or infatuated with the need of action like the pioneers of the unknown. But to go away when he knew that he was loved, was that wisdom or cowardice? For truly yes, she loved him. He had felt it, read it clearly in her looks. He had divined it, understood it. And was it just, when he had found Sylvia again, that he should take to flight as in the past when he thought he had lost her?

It was not Sylvia from whom he was flying, it was Norton's wife. His hand had, in turn, but a few minutes before felt in the hand clasp of the wife a tremulous timidity, while there was in that of the husband a sure and firm loyalty. Yes, it were better to depart again on his travels, not at hazard, but toward some useful goal and dower the world with a new realm now unknown, or else leave his bones by the way in some remote corner of Africa. But just when his feverish excitement was about to change into resolution, an image seemed to arise between him and that vague goal toward which he wished to direct his course. The calm, smiling face, with melancholy eyes, beaming under hair beginning to turn gray, the face of the Marchioness de

Solis. His mother! Should he again leave her alone, taking the risk, when he should return, if indeed he ever should return, of never seeing the dear one again? Ought this dear, innocent mother to support in this manner the counter-blow of her son's disappointments and sufferings?

The poor mother!

"No," he said, "I must not leave her I adore, now that the days are counted during which I may yet possess, cherish and love her."

He would remain, then; he would no longer be the wanderer he had been; he would stay beside her, whom the science of Dr. Fargeas had restored. It was upon this determination that he slept a little, toward dawn, as if the coming day had brought a languor to his eyes; tired and burning from insomnia.

On coming down to the dining-room at the breakfast hour, he was happy to find the marchioness. He kissed her as of old, in the neck, as he did when, a little child, he used to nestle beside her, then they sat down to the table. During the meal, Georges tried to give a tone of gaiety to all he said, which, however, seemed to the marchioness to be a little forced.

"Do you not think," she said, at the end of the meal, "that this crystal sounds a little false?" She

smiled lightly as she spoke, and tapped, with the point of her knife, a glass, which returned a dull sound.

“Yes,” added the mother, “the particles of glass no longer vibrate. It must be broken. Do you know this glass makes me think of your gayety of this morning?”

Georges did not answer.

“I did not have you with me yesterday, my dear child. Oh, I can understand how the time may not appear so long with Madame Norton, as with me. A mother is a mother in vain; she is none the less an old woman. And your American acquaintance has the gift of absorbing your mind.”

“I swear to you—” interrupted M. de Solis.

“Do not swear. I can see without my spectacles.”

The breakfast was over. The marchioness rose smiling and said:

“Do you want my opinion, my poor Georges? It is folly or madness.”

“It is not a madness.”

“Where will it lead you?” said the mother, suddenly.

The marquis answered: “Nowhere—or very far. Once, last night, I determined to go away

again, and if it had not been for you, my dear mother——”

Madame de Solis nodded:

“You would have again started for Tonquin or Congo. And who would have paid the expenses of the adventure? Your poor mother, who is so glad to have you for a little while, if even by chance, and who would see you start away again; why? Because forsooth, you have found in France a New York sweetheart! It is absurd. It is absurd and wicked,” she said, while Georges seated himself before her in a low chair, and softly took in his own her hands and kissed them, those dear mother’s hands, with the swollen blue veins.

She gently withdrew them, caressing her boy’s head as she used to do in his infancy, and with a tone as soft and soothing as her ancient cradle song she tried to allay his present suffering as she formerly did the fevers of his babyhood.

“You see, my child, if you wish to go away you need not go so far. Instead of imitating Stanley or M. de Brazza, if you will take my advice, go to Solis, and immure yourself there with me. You will see again the rows of ancient lindens where you used to run and play when you were a child. It is not a Louvre, our old Solis, but it is full of happy mem-

ories. We will make our wine as of old, provided the vines bear any grapes, and you will find some gentle little woman of the country, if Paris has not attracted them all to the *Allee des Poteaux* like so many butterflies."

"My mother," said the marquis, in a tone whose tenderness was itself a reproach.

"Oh! You are ready for a revolt. I have taken it into my head that you must marry. Yes, that is the end toward which all my plans tend. I was just now speaking to Mr. Norton about it."

"Norton?"

"We are friends also, since his visit yesterday. I am much pleased with this hewer of oaks, this manager of men. I left him on the beach. You know I am very early. I was coming from mass when I met him going to the telegraph office. He looked greatly worried. He expects some dispatch, I do not know what."

"And you spoke of me?" asked Georges.

"Yes, of you."

"Norton has enough to attend to in his own affairs, without interfering in those of others, especially when they are unimportant."

"How unimportant? Your possible marriage unimportant?" said the marchioness. "For you, per-

haps; but for me, it is another matter. You have never thought what a joy it would be to me, before I disappear from the scene forever, to know that you were happy, that you were tired of traveling all over the world and were ready to rest a little."

"At Solis?"

"Or elsewhere. Ask Mrs. Norton herself if this is not the *denouement* which her reason and friendship dictate. I may be a selfish old body, but what can you expect of me? I am tired of living alone in lodgings and having no news of you except by letters, dated I know not how many thousand leagues away, or by a dispatch by the Havas Agency. If I had known you would leave me all alone in Paris, I would have re-married. I am a great talker and I would have had some one to listen to me, at least. Come, my dear child, if you need to be consoled, if you have a sorrow, some little concealed wound—and I have noticed the crack in the glass, as you know—why go to Kamschatka to seek what you will as readily find at your hearthstone at Solis?"

"Perhaps I do not want to find that sort of consolation, my dear mother."

The sad smile which accompanied these words gave to the marchioness the impression that her son's state of mind was graver than she had supposed.

She felt a new anxiety which abated a little when Georges resumed the conversation by saying, that whether he were consoled or not, he would remain with her at Trouville, if she wished to finish the season there, or at Solis if she wanted to leave for home at once.

“After all,” thought the marchioness, “this passion for the American woman may be only a fire of straw,” and in their intimate life at the chateau de Solis, she certainly would, in time, get the better of her son’s melancholy.

Nor would she wait very long to make an attempt to cut short this dangerous romance, and knowing Mrs. Norton to be an honest woman, the marchioness resolved to make her appeal to Sylvia herself.

That very evening, under pretext of asking Mr. Norton about the dispatch which had given him so much anxiety, she asked Georges to accompany her to the villa. And after this first visit, others succeeded, bringing about an almost daily intimacy in this seaside life, in spite of the aroused uneasiness of the mother and the expressed desire of the son to again take his flight for unknown regions. Norton was constantly unbosoming himself, speaking of the world of business which he was managing and planning at a distance, and which he held firmly in hand

at the end of the transatlantic cable, anxious about what was taking place in Norton City, pre-occupied with his wells of natural gas at Pittsburg, with his mines at St. John, with his offices at New York, the Empire City as he called it, moving a world across the Atlantic and yet really thinking about nothing except the health of that woman for whom this king of iron, of oil and of coal had come to beg the intervention of the science of Dr. Fargeas.

They saw each other often, he and Georges, and one day the marquis found him anxiously waiting for some dispatch of importance and gravity. That same evening, accompanied by his mother, Solis went to the villa.

Norton and Sylvia were in the parlor overlooking the sea.

"Well," asked the marquis, "how about the dispatch?"

"Nothing yet," he answered. "I asked Montgomery to telegraph again, twice, three times."

He seemed troubled.

"It is something which annoys you particularly?" asked Georges, who seemed to shun Sylvia, whose manner was cold. She was examining, while talking with the marchioness, the pictures in an American review.

“Yes,” said Norton, “I am surprised that Spaulding has given me no news of the St. John mines. But I assure you, my dear Sylvia,” said he turning toward his wife, “that it is not my American interests which give me the most anxiety to-day ”

“What is it then?” asked she, laying the Harper’s Magazine upon a small table.

“You.”

“I?”

“Yes, you are more and more thoughtful, more and more suffering. I am afraid that all Dr. Fargeas’ science——”

Georges felt a sort of agony take possession of him. Norton, who had confided all his griefs to him in private, had never before spoken publicly of his anxieties. The marquis wanted to turn the conversation, which might be painful to Sylvia, into another channel, but he dared not.

Madame de Solis, as if she divined everything, responded quickly, addressing Norton:

“We do not cure in a day maladies which date from some period long in the past, but everything comes to him who can wait. I am persuaded that Mrs. Norton will return to New York completely cured, cured and happy. I have no need of

Dr. Fargeas' skill to predict that. I am a woman and that is enough."

"I hope that what you say may be true, marchioness," said Norton, "for my dear Sylvia's health makes every hour of my life anxious."

"My dear!" said Sylvia, softly, looking fondly at her husband, for she felt that she dared not look at M. de Solis.

"I say what I think," continued Norton, "and I have the right to say it publicly before the friend I love best in the world, have I not, Georges?"

He had turned and now faced the marquis, who, a little pale, was standing by his mother's chair.

"And, by the way," added Norton, "I have something to say to you."

"To me?" asked Solis.

"To you."

"Something important?"

"Important enough, and very private."

"That means that I am one too many in this conversation," said the marchioness "Oh! the poor women. Here is a mother whose son says, 'I am going away,' and a wife whose husband says, 'Leave me, please.' It is our fate to be suppressed, Nothing serious ever concerns us. Come, Mrs. Norton, if my company does not frighten you, let us

take a turn on the beach. Since they send us about our business, let us be gracious and obey."

"With pleasure," said Sylvia.

However, Mrs. Norton hesitated about going, for she was vaguely troubled about this interview which Norton had demanded.

She went out without looking at M. de Solis, who bowed profoundly as she passed him.

As soon as he was alone with Norton, Georges, without waiting for Norton to speak, said earnestly:

"You are decidedly troubled about that despatch!"

But Richard interrupted him with a quick gesture.

"The despatch! I have not thought about it. I want to talk to you; yes, about yourself, about your future. I want to resume our private conversation at the precise point where we left off the day of our first interview after your return. Do you not remember it?"

"No," answered Georges, who now foresaw a conversation which might be full of peril, and who wished to study the game of his adversary.

"Well, I remember it perfectly. I will tell you what it was, and where we left off," said Norton.

Then, putting his hand to his forehead:

"How hot it is! Do you not find it so?"

"It is, indeed."

Norton stepped to a table, and taking a bottle of seltzer poured a portion of its contents into a glass of sherry, which he rapidly drank, with lips as dry as if parched by a fever.

Then, making Georges sit down before him, near the window, he began, coldly, like a man of business discussing a matter of business:

"You were saying to me that, having arrived at a decisive period in your life, where you thought of marrying, you were restrained by some memory which had remained, clinging in your heart. Do you recall this confidence?"

"Perfectly," said Solis.

"I have often recurred to that conversation. You told me the story of the romance at the time, vaguely, but, if I remember, it was so distant, so nearly forgotten, so lost, I may say, in the mists of the past, as to make it possible for you to dispose of your heart and existence freely. That is what I understood at the time."

"That is about it," said the marquis.

"Well, about or exactly," said Norton a little brusquely. "When it is a question of the past, a shade, more or less, is of no importance. There is

no middle term between life and death. You wanted to marry. Therefore the past was buried for good and all. You are right. I have often since thought of what you then said to me. I love you well enough to wish to second your projects. You are looking for a bride. Well, I have found one for you."

"You?" said Georges staring at him.

Crossing his legs and playing with an unlighted cigar, the American, with an unsuccessful attempt at a smile, went on in a clear tone:

"Oh! it is not Mademoiselle Offenburger. No. It is a charming young girl. Very good. She is entirely ready to devote herself to him who shall love her. A little heart of gold, and with that heart a dowry of three millions."

"Norton!" exclaimed Solis, knitting his brows.

"Maybe that is too little," said the American smiling, as if he misunderstood the meaning of the marquis. "But she may consider as her own a part of what I possess. It is Eva, my niece Eva."

"Miss Eva?"

"She is pretty enough, I should think. She is intelligent to her finger-tips, and she has sufficiently good taste to pardon many faults in Paris in favor of that Parisian who pleases her."

“She has told you——”

“She has told me nothing. But, though I am a sort of delver, absorbed in preoccupations which ought, you would think, to keep all my attention riveted upon the transatlantic cable, I see very well. I divine clearly what is passing, and what people are thinking about around me. Eva is an exquisite being whom I adore; you are a devoted friend whom I esteem, and, in uniting you, I am persuaded that I should bring about a happy marriage—if there are any such.”

“Miss Eva is indeed adorable. She is an exquisite girl as you say, certainly—but—”

Richard was awaiting the response of Solis. And Georges, embarrassed, feeling that Norton had some design in all this talk which did not appear on the surface—not a trap but a test—Georges hesitated, seeking some reason for a refusal.

“Well,” said Norton at last, “you are not going to refuse my niece? You would indeed be hard to suit, for you will not find her equal. Are not three millions a sufficient dowry? It is very simple. She shall have six!”

The marquis expostulated, finding perhaps in this offer of a dowry, the looked-for pretext.

"You do not think, Norton, that such a question—"

Richard quickly interrupted him:

"I know, I know. I only speak of it to prove how much I love my dear sister's child. She has grown up by my side. She has known me when I was poor. It is just that I should divide with her now that I am rich."

"Miss Eva will not want for suitors. And I hope she will find a man worthy of her."

Norton had risen.

"There is no need to hope for such a suitor. Behold that man. It is yourself," he said, slapping Solis on the shoulder.

"It is impossible," said the marquis.

"Why?"

"Because I have reflected. Because the notions of marriage of which I spoke to you have given place to other ideas."

"Then you do not want to marry?"

"No."

"Your determination to lead a bachelor life has developed very suddenly," said Norton in a mocking tone.

"Besides, and it is very natural, if I were to marry a woman it would be because I loved her."

“Eva, who is disposed to like you, would soon cause you to adore her,” answered Norton. “But in truth, my dear, in speaking to you to-day, as I have spoken, I only place within reach of your decision that future of which you were thinking when you confided to me your intention to marry. I can still hear you say: *‘When one has not married the woman he loves he might as well leave to chance the care of making himself love the person whom he shall marry.’* Is that not still your opinion?”

Georges felt that in becoming so pressing in his recommendations, in pushing him thus into his inner intrenchments, Norton had an object. It was a sort of moral duel, in which the husband sought to make the friend uncover himself. And Solis, master of himself, played a close game, pretending not to understand.

“No,” he said, “I am no longer of that opinion. I have reflected, as I said just now, and I wish to remain free.”

“Free!” said Norton. “An honest man who marries an honest woman doubles his liberty by a devotion, and this it is which teaches him that there is no liberty without duty. This marriage—it is an idea which has come to me suddenly, as all my happy thoughts come—by inspiration. Yes, I

tell you this marriage would assure Eva's happiness and yours. I have reflected over it. I wish it." He accented the words, *I wish* it. "Zounds! man, you ought to marry."

"Why?" said Georges.

Norton's manner became more animated. "Ah! why? All the reasons you have given me for not marrying are not the true ones. You tell me you will not marry Eva, because she is an American. Madame de Solis, who is full of French prejudices against the Americans, told me but a little time ago that for her Eva was an ideal young woman."

"Did my mother know that you intended to speak to me about Miss Eva?"

"No, on my word; and if I mention the marchioness to you it is because I am certain that she will be happy to keep you with her, married, housed and settled."

"If you had said to my mother that Miss Meredith counts her fortune by millions, she would have answered you that heiresses of this description are not suitable matches for noblemen who have no other fortune than their name."

Richard laughed nervously.

"Their name, their blason, their honor. Are you going to cast in my teeth the millions we have

gained loyally, as you did your titles formerly? Sweat is equal to blood, my dear. And then I am not like so many parvenu fools, vain of my wealth. Don't try at least to make me regret my riches. If I think of you for Eva it is because I wish that my child may be at once happy and honored, and because, I repeat, I love you as I esteem you."

"You are generosity itself, my dear Norton, but I have said and I say again, I do not want to marry."

"You do not want to marry?"

"No."

"Is it because you prefer to reserve your liberty?"

"What do you mean?" asked Georges, a little haughtily.

"Would it not be, rather," said Norton, planting himself before M. de Solis. "because you are, in reality, no longer free?"

"I do not understand," said the marquis coldly.

"That old love of yours. That passion you left, I don't know where—in America, who knows—have you really forgotten it? Ah! you have almost told me that story, my dear marquis. It was not necessary for you to tell me anything if you did not wish to see me one day or other meddle in your life."

Georges smiled, "My life," he said, "has nothing

of mystery in it. You are at liberty to ask me any questions you please about it."

"Well, then, if to explain to myself, why you refuse the match I offer you, I should ask you if you still love the woman you have loved, and whether this woman is still alive and where she now is, would you answer me frankly and without hesitation?"

"I would respond frankly, loyally, if I were not, in so doing, betraying the secret of another."

Norton nervously shrugged his shoulders, as if to compel himself to be calm, put his hands into his pockets and began to walk up and down with long strides, turning now and then to look at M. de Solis, who stood impassively watching him. The American, who was accustomed to handling men and iron, became for the moment almost brutal in his impatience, and with his breath coming and going like the puffing of a locomotive, he continued:

"Yes, I understand, *another*. That is the word. And now your refusal to answer me is explained. How could you marry Eva if you love some one else? Can a man of honor give his hand to a woman when he has given his heart to another? The other! There is the obstacle. And this other is before you to-day, as she was yesterday, as she will be, forever, eternally. You are thinking of her now. You think

about nothing but her. You wanted to marry, you told me a few days ago, to forget the other! Can one forget? And how could you forget her when you have seen her again? For you have seen her; I am certain of it. She is in France! Evidently, in France. Who knows? Perhaps at Trouville?"

"If she were here, as you say, there would be the more merit in my leaving, since I should fly from her presence, and I am going away to Solis forever," said Solis softly.

"You! going away?"

"And why do you wish me to marry Miss Eva? She is too young, too eager for life to be made to accept either of the two existences which now claim me; that of a man tired of illusions, crouching in the chimney corner of his Chateau des Landes, or that of the baggage of an eccentric man of science, to-day in Trouville, to-morrow in Timbuctoo, if Solis turned out to be too dull."

Norton gazed steadily into the calm eyes of the marquis, as if he would surprise his inmost thought.

"Then that is the only reason you can give for your refusal."

"That is the only reason," said Georges.

The American was not convinced. He thought he now understood the reason for the marquis' ex-

treme reticence. He said to himself that if M. de Solis talked of again setting forth on his travels, it was because he could not trust himself to remain. A flight was often an avowal.

Norton was about to push the conversation further when a noise of voices was heard in the direction of the door. A servant announced "Monsieur Montgomery," and out of breath, and very red in the face, Mr. Montgomery entered, holding a dispatch in his hand, and said to his associate with a shake of the head:

"Ah! Norton, my dear Norton."

"Well," said Richard coldly. Montgomery held out to him the blue envelope, still sealed.

"The dispatch—bad news."

"You know its contents?"

"Yes, they addressed me in a duplicate dispatch. I have read my dispatch."

"But what is it then?" asked Georges.

"The St. John mines, near Norton City," began Montgomery.

Norton had slowly broken the seal which fastened the blue paper containing two printed lines, and completed Montgomery's phrase:

"Inundated."

Then re-reading the dispatch, its dramatic brevity

big with consequences and perils, he repeated its contents aloud.

“Prompt measures to be taken. Come.” The American folded the dispatch gently, like a general receiving the order to charge, and with his eye fixed upon an invisible point, as it were, on the other side of the Atlantic, he said:

“Inundated! The mines! It may be a disaster! My fortune and Eva’s!”

And, smiling in a strange manner, he turned to Georges, saying:

“God forbid that I may have to return with the news that Eva has nothing and that her millions will no longer embarrass disdainful noblemen of France.”

And not able to restrain a movement of impatience against the unexpected news which had spoiled his plans, by throwing an unforeseen obstacle in his path, he exclaimed:

“Thunder! St. John under water!”

“Well?” asked Montgomery; and this word brought Norton back to the reality of the situation, to the necessity of taking some immediate step.

“Well!” and Norton looked at his watch.

“The steamer which sails from Southampton has gone. But to-morrow— Do you go to the telegraph station, Montgomery.”

"To the telegraph station?" inquired Georges.

"Yes; tell them to expect me in New York by the next transatlantic steamer."

"You are going then?"

"Necessarily; I want to see for myself."

"Are you going alone?" asked Montgomery.

"I do not know yet. That depends upon Mrs. Norton," answered Richard.

CHAPTER VIII.

Norton had said nothing to Sylvia. Excusing himself to M. de Solis, he begged him not to allow the marchioness to suspect anything, and Georges, finding his mother, left the *Villa Normande*, carrying away with him a strange sensation, the sensation that Richard, without really guessing the truth, yet had the perception, that to Sylvia's nervous suffering there was added some mental suffering, and that the American would, hereafter, try to fall on the scent until he knew all. But in the meantime he had to face an unexpected crisis in his transatlantic affairs.

Richard asked Montgomery to come back in the forenoon of the following day. He, Norton, would pass the greater part of the night in making the calculations necessary to meet the catastrophe. He was, besides, ready for the struggle, having lost nothing of that energy, of that combativeness, of that courage, at once moral and muscular, which the Americans call pluck. He was up early, having arranged an entire plan of campaign. He took a steamer for Havre, as he wished, before leaving

France, to give some instructions to his banker and also to engage on board the *Normandie*, which was to sail in three days, staterooms for himself and Sylvia, for he might, perhaps, ask his wife to accompany him.

He disliked, in fact, to leave Sylvia in France, and the thought of his inundated mines at St. John was less painful to him than the moral anxieties which increased in him in proportion as he analyzed more deeply and at a nearer view his wife's state of mind.

“He struggled, voluntarily, not against a feeling of jealousy, but against ideas which saddened, which troubled him and which made him regard, almost as a matter of little importance, the misfortune, the news of which had been brought by the telegraph. And he, the man of deeds, of success, shrugged his shoulders—those shoulders which he had thought broad enough to bear everything—and said to himself:

“The wound which money makes is not mortal. It is moral suffering which kills.”

The necessity which compelled him to arrange his affairs at the bank, to take his berths on the steamer, swept from his mind some of his dark fancies. At Havre, the bustle of life in the port, the

activity in the docks and basins, made him think of his own country, the noise and friction of the hard labor amid which his youth had been passed.

Norton experienced, in finding himself among these sailors and longshoremen, the sensation of being in New York, or some other American port amid the hum and hurry of a vast commerce involving millions of dollars. Those hides just landed and thrown upon the wharf in piles like so many thinly sawn boards, those heaps of wood from Norway with their fine odor of pine arranged in geometric masses so yellow and pure looking that in the distance they seemed like great blocks of butter; those bales of Campeachy wood, red, as if the hewn trunks were still bleeding; those basins where workmen by scores were hammering upon the metallic sides of ships; where great transatlantic steamers were getting up steam in readiness for their departure; where steamers and sailing vessels were arriving, their sides scanned with long voyages and their keels incrustated with shells of strange forms unknown in France, which had become fastened there in their passage through southern seas and whose bizarre form gave one the impression of some strange, white floral growth; those embankments of earth which were being thrown up as far as the eye could reach toward Tan-

carville, the new quays, bright in the clear sunlight, that conquest of man over the sea; that activity which seemed even simple and slow-going to him who could move worlds, yet gave him the vision of another existence than that in which he had been passing his days at Trouville, more feverish, more tumultuous, odors of tar, of wood of the isles, of tanned hides, of coal, coke, brine, and of the sea—all these impressions met him at every turn, and he found himself, as it were, again in the midst of the battle, and his spirits rose as do those of the soldier at the smell of gunpowder and saltpetre.

Then, suddenly, when on board the *Normandie*, it was of Sylvia he thought. He again saw all the places where, between New York and Havre, he had sat with her under an awning during the long days, when, with her eyes full of sadness, she regarded those two infinitives—the sea and sky. He asked for the same two staterooms contiguous to each other, which they had occupied. He paused before the chart upon which the route passed over, for each successive day was marked by a pin surmounted by a little tri-colored flag. With what curiosity had Eva followed these curves traced on the chart which marked the steamer's course. But Sylvia had remained impassible, indifferent, as if to her life

must be equally monotonous and empty, whether passed in America or Europe. Again, if the wind rose, she seemed to breathe with difficulty as if her heart were wrung by an unseen hand; as if the gale suffocated her. Then she would become cast down and gloomy in spirit. Norton recalled these sad, melancholy phases in his wife's conduct, the secret of which he seemed to possess to-day. And the image of Solis passed and repassed before his eyes.

Yes, in leaving France he should perhaps take Sylvia and Eva with him. He would at least engage their places, and he looked through the port-hole of the cabin they would occupy, at the port, the shipping, and said to himself that doubtless *she* would soon be there, and that the misfortune which was taking them home might perhaps spare her suffering here.

Assured that the wished for staterooms would be reserved for him, Norton, after some final directions left at the bank, returned to Trouville, where he found Montgomery awaiting him at the Normanvilla, reading the New York *Herald*.

"Well, my dear Montgomery, everything is arranged. I leave on Saturday morning. Three days will pass quickly. You will be good enough to telegraph me at New York if anything happens

here. But above all, I want you to keep secret the dispatch which you brought me. The news of such a disaster might be extremely prejudicial to our interests. You are one of my partners in the Dakota railroad enterprise. I need not, to you, enlarge upon the importance of my trip. If Mrs. Norton accompanies me, it is just possible that I may not return to France. If, on the contrary, she remains with my niece, I shall return to Trouville or Paris within a short time. Until then, I leave you in charge of my material interests in France. I only hope no one knows anything yet about the disaster."

"I think not," said Montgomery. "At the Casino, where you can hear gossip on all the news, I have not heard a whisper concerning our dispatch."

"So much the better. I shall have time then to repair everything before the alarm shall have been given. I have thought the whole matter over and am prepared. The trouble is in reality not beyond remedy. But evil reports increase in size as the squares of the distances over which they travel. If it were known in Paris that the St. John mines were under water, my credit, considerable as it is, would be injured, and I should need to have everybody's confidence to go on with the great enterprises I still have in hand.

These are enterprises whose success involves the happiness and well-being of a world of people, as you know. Villages for working women, boarding-houses for working men, cheaper railways, special coaches for poor people——”

“Philanthropic vagaries which will doubtless cost you dear.”

“And when have dreams not cost some one dear?” said Norton with a sad smile. “Everything costs, even chimeras—especially chimeras. Then, my friend, it is agreed upon.”

“Agreed, very well. I will cable you all the news at all important! When I say all, I mean that I shall leave out some. Yes, there will be much to leave out, very much.” And Montgomery added, shaking his immense head, “happily.”

There was in this last word something like a hidden meaning which awoke the attention of Richard.

“Why happily?” he asked.

“Oh! if we are to pay attention to all the gossip which is hawked about.”

“Then the world has words to lose, it seems,” said Norton.

“If it only were a question of losing them. But on the contrary it picks up stories.”

“What do you mean, Montgomery? You know I do not like enigmas. What have you heard?”

“Oh! nothing. Nothing at all. I was just philosophizing.”

“Ah! there is my wife,” he said, looking out the window. “My wife and M. Bernière. They have been to visit Mrs. Norton. And, by the way, yes there is to be a party to-day, a surprise party.”

“You have not told Mrs. Montgomery about the dispatch I received, have you?”

“No, oh, no! Besides, my wife and I talk very little together. And never of business. We talk art, painting and portraits.”

And Montgomery heaved a sigh like the blast from a blacksmith's bellows. He had begun to explain why he sighed in this manner, when Mrs. Montgomery, superb in a dress of old gold, set off with moss green ribbons, entered the room.

“*Bon jour*, Norton,” she exclaimed, holding out her hand to Richard.

Then, noticing Montgomery, she added with an air of astonishment: “Why, my husband, how are you, dear?”

“Very well,” said Montgomery.

“Have you seen Harrison?” asked the handsome Liliane.

“Now for the portrait—now for it,” growled Montgomery, in an aside to Norton.

“Yes,” he answered, “I have seen Harrison;” and again a loud sigh escaped him.

“And he has accepted?” asked Mrs. Montgomery.

“He has accepted.”

“So much the better. He will make an excellent portrait of me. He already knows my physiognomy.”

The second husband of the fair Liliane tried not to frown and said:

“That is precisely what he had the goodness to remark. He is a very elegant man, your—this Mr. Harrison. And it is a fine thing for me, the second husband, to go to ask the first——”

“Come now, you are not going to be jealous. In the first place, though I am not madly in love with your name, I am as loyal to it as if it were written with two *m*'s. And then if there is any one who ought to be jealous—honest now—it is not you; it is Harrison.”

“Exactly,” interrupted Montgomery. “But all the same, I swear to you that Carolus——”

“Carolus?”

“Carolus would have painted you a portrait worth two of Harrison's.

"Yes, but then Carolus would have to study me, whereas with Harrison all that is already done."

Then turning toward Norton, who was not listening, his eye fixed in a deep reverie, she asked:

"Is Sylvia visible?"

"Certainly," said Norton. "I pray you to excuse me, madam. I should like to take a turn at the Casino for a moment. I want," he said to Montgomery, in a low voice, "to be seen at the Casino up to the last moment, and if my departure can take place unnoticed——"

"I will go with you. You have nothing more to say to me, my dear Liliane?"

"No; good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye."

The gentlemen started to go out, when Liliane recalled her husband with a smile:

"Ah, Lionel, my dear Lionel!"

"Liliane?"

"Oh, thank you, for Harrison, you know. Yes, I understand all the merit of what you have done. I thank you twice over."

"With two *m's*," said Montgomery with a sigh, as he went out.

Liliane followed her husband with that indulgent expression habitual to women who are accustomed

to resign themselves, and then she asked a valet to announce her presence to Mrs. Norton.

Sylvia was in her room, reclining upon an extension chair; and half rising, she seemed to welcome this visit which came to her like a ray of sunlight.

“Good day, my dear. Let me look at her face,” said Liliane, and she examined her friend’s visage.

“Oh, we are not so badly off to-day. I have wanted so to see you to-day. But my visit will not, perhaps, cause you so much pleasure as it will me.”

“What are you saying?” said Sylvia. “You know how much I love you.”

“Oh! I mean that I am so wild, and my fools bells may not please your melancholy. But to-day,” and she lowered her voice, “I have something to say to you—yes, something serious. I shall almost have to scold you.”

“Me?” said Mrs. Norton, astonished at the grave air so suddenly affected by her friend.

“Yes; you have not been sufficiently prudent, my dear. You promenade on the beach—all alone—too late!”

“That is what Dr. Fargeas is always repeating to me—that he also thinks I am imprudent, as you say. But it is idle for him to pretend that the sea-air at a certain hour is bad for my chest, or my nerves, I am

not quite sure which, for I experience none the less an infinite pleasure in being alone, free, thinking about anything I like, going where I please on the then deserted beach."

"I understand," said Mrs. Montgomery. "But it is not your solitary beach walks that I have to scold you for."

"What is it then?"

Liliane hesitated a moment, as if she feared she might be indiscreet in what she was about to say; then softly seating herself by the side of her friend, she took both her hands in her own:

"My dear Sylvia, you know whether I love you or not. I would throw myself into the water for you. And when I say into the water, I must confess that that would be no great sacrifice in this weather. I would throw myself into the fire. Truly! I would like to see you happy, very happy, and I know that you are not happy. But I know that change of scene will not bring happiness."

"I do not understand you," said Sylvia, astonished.

"And yet it is very simple. Look at me, for example. I married Harrison. I do not know precisely why I married him. I soon conceived a strong repugnance for him; I do not know why—I

accepted the hand of Mr. Montgomery, in virtue of, I know not what impulse. Well, in all sincerity, my dear friend, the difference, oh! *mon Dieu*, amounts to nothing. A husband is always a husband. He who replaces one husband is but another."

Sylvia looked at Liliane with her deep, sorrowful eyes:

"I am listening to what you say, my dear Liliane, but truly, I swear to you, I do not know what you mean."

"Well, then, you will permit me to speak frankly?"

"I want you to speak frankly."

"And you will not be angry at anything I may say?"

"Not at all."

"You know—I repeat that I am your friend."

"And my only friend," said Mrs. Norton, in a firm voice.

"What have you done to Arabella Dickson?"

"To Arabella?"

"Or to Mrs. Dickson, or to Colonel Dickson, or, in short, to any of the trio?"

"I have done nothing at all to them," answered Sylvia, very much surprised. "I do not know the Dicksons. I think Miss Arabella is very handsome, that is all."

“That is all! And do you suppose that you can dismiss the family with a simple ‘that is all,’ when you have to deal with a mother determined to marry off her daughter, a daughter who has been exhausted in showing off her pretty shoulders and arms from Monte Carlo to Weisbaden, and from Luchon to Dinard, to say nothing of the redoubtable colonel, who has besieged more prospective sons-in-law than he ever did citadels? Well, everybody is furious against you, my dear Sylvia, and there is gossip and gossip. It is like the buzzing of a hive of bees—and not honey bees, either,” added Liliane, laughing.

Sylvia became anxious without the power to explain the cause of this anxiety.

“And why these rumors?” she asked at length. “The more you talk to me of the Dicksons the less I understand how I can possibly—”

“Well, do not be angry then. M. de Solis—”

“M. de Solis?”

“Yes; it is upon him that the colonel and Mrs. Dickson and Miss Dickson have trained their batteries. And M. de Solis does not seem inclined to capitulate, and as he, perhaps, has reasons for not doing so—”

“Reasons! What reasons?” asked Sylvia, brusquely.

“Can *you* ask?” said Mrs. Montgomery. “Now,

Sylvia, I am going to prove to you all my affection for you by showing myself very indiscreet. But I swear to you," she said, with an accent of sincerity, "yes, I swear to you that it is the friendship I bear you which compels me to speak. I have said that you were very imprudent. Well, I repeat you are very imprudent."

"I? And what do you mean?"

"Wait! You have often gone in the direction of Tourgeville to a fisherman's hut—very picturesque, I have photographed it; I will show you the negative. It was a splendid success. My apparatus is an excellent one; it is a detective. But you have gone there, more than once, at an hour when there was scarcely any—photogenic light!"

"I went to carry food to a poor woman in whom I am interested," said Sylvia.

Liliane smiled.

"Oh! I know that very well. But the misfortune is, that no later than yesterday you were seen—"

"Yesterday?"

"And that five minutes after your entry into Mother Ruaud's, M. de Solis—"

"M. de Solis?"

"Opened the door also and entered after you."

"After me?"

"I do not know what Colonel Dickson could have been doing in that neighborhood—some reconnoissance—offensive, no doubt. The awkward fact is that he saw you."

Sylvia started to her feet and an angry red mounted to her pale cheeks.

"He saw me at Mother Ruaud's, with M. de Solis? It is false," she cried indignantly. "He has lied! He may have seen M. de Solis. He may have seen another woman, but it was not I. It was not I."

Her tone of melancholy sincerity almost made Mrs. Montgomery regret that she had spoken.

"I believe you, my dear Sylvia, I believe you. But none the less the colonel and his parrot of a wife have told the story."

"What does it matter to me what they say?" said Sylvia shrugging her shoulders. "What do I care what people do, of whose existence I am ignorant and whose occupation seems to be to spy upon my actions? M. de Solis at Victor Ruaud's, with another woman!"

She stopped suddenly, thoughtful, anxious, and then said abruptly:

"What other woman?"

Liliane shook her head, smiling almost sadly; for Liliane was always smiling.

"Oh! my poor dear. That is a question I will not advise you to ask of any one else than myself."

"What have I done?" asked Sylvia, as if unconscious of the avowal contained in her thoughtless interrogatory.

"Oh! nothing. But the simple idea that another—the simple idea—Why you are jealous, my poor dear. It is more serious than I would have believed. You love him always. I envy you the capacity to really love some one—only I pity you, too."

She took in her arms, as she spoke, the young wife, whose eyes were moist with tears; and with maternal pity she tried to infuse a little confidence into this soul in distress.

A gentle knock at the door made both women start.

"Dry your eyes, Sylvia."

Then smiling, "Come in," she said. It was Dr. Fargeas.

"Well, I am surprised," he said, laughing. "Your villa is certainly well guarded. Not a servant to announce my coming. Well, Madame Norton, how are our nerves to-day? Are we getting the better of them a little?"

"You see," said Liliane, pointing to the still tearful Sylvia.

"Oh! oh!" and the doctor shook his head. "No, we are not getting the better of them, the miserable nerves. What is the matter with us this morning?"

"I do not know—a turn."

"Which I was so silly as to provoke by a piece of idle gossip," said Mrs. Montgomery. "You are angry with me?" she asked Sylvia.

"No, my dear Liliane; on the contrary, I see that you love me tenderly."

The doctor screwed his lips into a grimace, expressive of his displeasure.

"Ah! these emotions, these super-excitements. You know I must forbid all that. It is like the sea-side. I do not think we shall succeed at the sea-side. We must try the mountains, I think. Bagnères, Cambo, or simply go back to Paris. It is there, after all, where we have the least degree of cold in winter and of heat in summer."

"We are never so well off as when we are at home," said Liliane. "I have an idea, doctor. What if Sylvia should go back to America?"

Fargeas shook his head.

"A voyage! no, no! Do not think of that. But I should like, without going so far—remaining in France, that she should have some calm, some repose. Have you a pen? I will write a prescription."

And while he wrote rapidly, using Sylvia's bureau for a desk, Liliane read over his shoulder:

"Iodide of Sodium—50 centigrammes a day, night and morning, in a teacupful of the decoction of valerian. To be continued for one month."

"Always the same thing," she said.

"Ah! you think so?" said the doctor. "There might be other remedies—but—"

"But?" asked Liliane.

"Pardon, dear madame. The faculty has its secrets."

"And a woman can guess them sometimes," retorted Mrs. Montgomery.

She had turned toward Sylvia, who had just received from a valet some cards which he had brought on a tray, and she noticed the emotion of Mrs. Norton.

"What now?" she asked. And in turn she examined the cards: Monsieur de Bernière, the Marquis and the Marchioness de Solis.

"Georges de Solis!" exclaimed Liliane. "But you cannot receive them."

"And why should I not receive them?" said Sylvia. "Only I need to compose myself. What you have said has unnerved me a little. Would you be kind enough, my dear friend, to ask the marchioness

to be a little patient? Take them into the parlor; I will join you in a moment."

"Very well, I will go down," said Liliane.

She looked at Dr. Fargeas, who was still writing and who had not raised his head during this conversation, and as she went out the door she thought:

"Valerian! For the heart—yes, that may hinder its beating, but it will not keep it from suffering."

CHAPTER IX.

Madame de Solis, with her son and nephew, was waiting in the parlor, whose wide open door gave a glimpse of the blue sea dotted with bright sails; of the sky striped with lines of sea-gulls, like swirls of snowflakes—the whole making a background as of some admirable piece of tapestry.

“I beg you to excuse Mrs. Norton,” said Liliane, on entering. “She will be with you in a moment. If you will accept me as her substitute—”

“I hope we are disturbing no one,” said Madame de Solis.

“Not even myself, who have finished my prescription,” said Dr. Fargeas, entering.

“A patient?” asked the marchioness.

The son completed his mother’s question.

“Mrs. Norton?”

“Oh! always the same state of over-excitement, but nothing more serious, thank heaven,” answered Dr. Fargeas.

“You undertake to cure Mrs. Norton, do you not, doctor?” asked M. de Solis.

“If the colonel were here he would guess the

whole secret quickly, and he would need no field-glass either," thought Liliane.

"Mrs. Norton will not be in any danger," said Fargeas, "unless she is made to experience too violent emotions. We have nothing of that sort to dread, I hope. And you, marquis, do you think of remaining at Trouville for any length of time?"

"You say that, doctor," said the marchioness laughing, "exactly as if you should ask my son, 'Are you not going away soon?'"

Fargeas answered solemnly:

"Change is what I oftenest recommend—change of air, change of ideas. There is everything in it."

"But you said to me one day, doctor," said Liliane, "that there was nothing equal to the home, the cozy fireside."

"Ah!" And the doctor nodded, as he usually did when he was about to utter a philosophical opinion: "That depends on the nature and gravity of the malady."

"I was of your first opinion yesterday," said the marchioness, "and I was about to beg my son to make a sacrifice for me—to come and keep me company at Solis, but I have thought better of it. And I have had letters from there. Solis is dull—dull. We shall have no vintage this year. There is not a

grape. Solis is like Paris—it is affected with that moral sickness which all your remedies cannot cure, doctor. It has—but Mrs. Montgomery will be angry with me—”

“Why?” asked Liliane.

“Because what I am about to say is very uncomplimentary to your countrywomen.”

“I’ll wager you are going to rally the American men and women, and laugh at what you call—it is a little difficult to pronounce—Americanisms.”

“Exactly,” answered the marchioness.

Bernière, who was sitting in a corner of the room, and who had as yet said nothing, interrupted the marchioness abruptly:

“The American women! Do not speak slightly of them, my aunt. They are superior creatures. They are the true women. It is the American women alone who are now in fashion.”

“Thanks!” said Liliane, mockingly.

But the marchioness, leaning back in her arm chair like a woman of the eighteenth century, as she was, paid no heed to the interruption.

“All that you say,” she went on, “has not hindered America from ravaging the vines of Solis, and with our vines, our French manners—our poor, old, intimate, cozy French manners. It has not prevented

your America, with its delicious women, from bringing to Paris, as to my poor vines at Solis, a nothing—a mere nothing—an American disease—the mildew.”

“The—what is its name?” asked Bernière.

“The mildew.”

“Pronounced mil-dee-oo,” said Mrs. Montgomery laughing.

“I understand, madame. And what is the mildew, if you please, aunt?”

“Ask the doctor,” said Madame de Solis.

“You are not a wine-grower, that is certain,” said the doctor.

“No,” replied Bernière.

“Well,” said the marchioness, “the mildew is an amiable fungus parasite, which was moldering quietly twelve or fifteen years ago in America, and which our good vines did not know until some one took it into his head to transplant American vines into France. Before that time we had the phylloxera——”

“The phylloxera sounds more patriotic,” said Bernière.

“We fought the phylloxera and we have the mildew. The mildew—that little red parasite which stains the green leaves red and dries them up, which

shrivels, which eats, which at least kills them. And when you try to kill it with sulphur and lime, and think it is burned out, buried with the winter's snows, behold! it reappears with the roses in the spring. The mildew, that necessity for tumult, for riches, for movement, for luxury, for bustle, which makes of our France an America on a small scale! The mildew, that incessant din which has replaced that good, old-fashioned, modest, unpretending French life—the life of our grandmothers; the mildew, that eternal pose, that everlasting pretense, that exposure to the public gaze of the details of private life, of all that was intimate and sweet, and, as it were, perfumed with peace, which characterized the life we used to live. And yet the heart is as warm, good will is as extensive, wit is as sparkling; there are the same virtues in this beautiful France of ours, and the vine which the sun gilds and matures always produces the most generous wine; but observe, the wit, the good will, the heart, the vine and the life, all are stung, all are stained by this moral mildew. There is something the matter with all these things. What? Something imponderable; something indefinable. I do not say incurable. It is nothing, and yet it is something. It is not grave, and it may not be mortal.

It is—what shall I call it, my nephew? It is the *chic*, the luxury, it is the pose, it is the crack of the whip in the fierce steeple-chase for distinction, it is the moldering of the virtues—it is the mildew!”

“Good heavens!” cried Mrs. Montgomery, who had listened to this bantering speech of the marchioness as she would have listened to an air at the opera. “And are we the cause of all this?”

“*Mon Dieu!* Yes,” said Madame de Solis. “Pretty nearly! But there are exceptions,” she added, with a smile.

“And here is one,” cried Mrs. Montgomery, pointing to Eva, who was entering.

“My dear Eva, you must come to the rescue. They are slandering our America.”

Eva paused, after saluting Madame de Solis.

“They are slandering America? Who?” she asked, drawing up her pretty head in a charming bellicose manner.

“The marchioness,” answered Liliane, “who blames us with having perverted Paris, damaged the vines, and I do not know what besides.”

Madame de Solis was smiling.

“Oh! it was a little tirade,” she said. “It was not meant for you, my dear child, nor for Mrs. Montgomery. But I am an old Frenchwoman, a little

obstinate in my preference for the old-fashioned ways, and wherever I see eccentricities showing their claws——”

“You cry out that the offending innovators are American,” said Liliane.

“Entirely unjust,” said Doctor Fargeas. “In the matter of follies, we have no need of importations. We manufacture them readily enough for ourselves.”

“I shall not permit myself to reply to Madame de Solis,” said Eva, “but I think that we have much to pardon in each other, both French and Americans. It is quite natural that the Americans in Paris should be judged, as we judge the French in New York. When I first came here I actually thought I was in Babylon——”

“Hanging gardens and all?” said M. de Bernière.

“Oh! worse than that—A succession of caverns.”

“And now, how do you find it?”

“Oh! now I find that I was unjust—like the marchioness, no doubt.”

“We have not yet invented the mildew,” said Madame de Solis.

She had approached Eva and was looking at a little circlet of gold, ornamented with pearls, which adorned the young girl's wrist.

“Why, what a pretty bracelet you have!”

"It is not from Tiffany's, it is French," said Eva; and turning to Georges she said, in a bantering tone: You see, Monsieur de Solis, it is not one of those heavy bracelets we were speaking of—do you remember?"

"Ah! true!" said the marquis.

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"It is just like Sylvia's."

"It is charming!" said Georges.

"Charming!" added Liliane.

And Eva thought: "Charming because Sylvia thinks it is pretty."

Bernière, who had also examined the bracelet, repeating, like everybody else, the word *charming*, asked Liliane, suddenly:

"Ah! Mrs. Montgomery—pardon! Will you permit me a question?"

"Certainly."

"What is this little paper I received yesterday, signed by you?" And he took from his card-case a piece of folded cardboard.

"Well! haven't you read it?"

"Have I read it? See, it says: 'To-morrow at six o'clock, precisely—*surprise party*. Villa Normande—at Mrs. Norton's.' "

"Surprise party, well?"

"Well? That signifies that to-day—at six o'clock—without Mrs. Norton's knowledge, we invade her villa, install ourselves at her piano, we dance, we are masters of the house; we give a party at Sylvia's and she knows nothing of it. You do not know it? It is an American custom."

"The mildew," repeated Madame de Solis.

Fargeas smiled:

"Then the gossips do not lie. They really do these things over there?"

"Right along. A surprise party does not please you then. A party sprung upon you at your own house, suddenly, at an unexpected hour."

"With a disarrangement of my books? Why I should feel like sending out for the police."

"That would be useless. When you want them they are never to be found."

"But," said Eva laughing, "now that you have let me know, it is no surprise party."

"Well, do not tell Sylvia, who knows nothing about it," said Mrs. Montgomery. "It may distract her a little."

"Especially as we shall be numerous," said Bernière. "The handsome Miss Arabella is to be one of us."

“How! Miss Dickson!”

“Why, yes; she was reading in my presence, on the beach, a similar invitation signed by your hand.”

“Ah! so she did. I had forgotten. I have made a fine mess of it. I had sent off the letters before I heard of the colonel's tattle about Sylvia. And it is just like him to come, and Mrs. Dickson, too; the trio, in fact. Oh! how disagreeable it will be!”

“Why?” asked Bernière.

“Nothing. We will see the colonel maneuver, that is all.”

The Marchioness de Solis leaned over and whispered to Dr. Fargeas:

“They are a little flighty, are they not? All these American women?”

“No, not all. You yourself have made exceptions;” and jerking his head in the direction of Eva, who was talking with Georges, he repeated: “No not all, there are exceptions.”

“I know,” said the marchioness, “the mildew does not destroy all the bunches.”

And as Sylvia entered, the doctor wanted to add that she, too, was not tainted with the mildew, as the marchioness may have supposed; but Mrs. Norton had already gone to Madame de Solis, and with her

sweet, languid voice, begged pardon for having kept her waiting.

"I was not very well," she said.

"Your poor health. I did hope you were getting better."

"Ask the doctor as to that," said Sylvia.

"She ought to be better than she is," said Fargeas. "I am not quite satisfied with her, to tell the truth."

Madame de Solis studied with a sort of mortal anxiety—selfish in reality—the pretty American matron whom her son scarcely seemed to notice, and with an expression of real good-will, she said, speaking deliberately:

"I do not understand the science of medicine very well, but it seems to me, dear Mrs. Norton, that there must be a good deal of imagination in your suffering."

"Imagination!" And Sylvia seemed to be trying to ascertain what her real condition of mind was.

"Oh! I know very well," said the marchioness. "As soon as we believe we are ill, we *are* ill. How unhappy one is, mentally, as soon as he believes he is. How easily one can imagine he is in love to the point of dying for it, from the moment he imagines he is in love. Am I not right, doctor?"

"Yes, yes. That is a part of my theory. I expend my pity only upon the misfortunes which are inevitable."

"Which are?" asked Georges, who felt it necessary to take part in the conversation.

"Oh! I think I have already given you, over and over again, my formula. Do not make me reiterate. It is a proverb. It is my formula of the three capital *M's*.

"Two more than are found in Montgomery of New York," said Liliane, laughing.

"And what are the three *M's*, doctor?"

"Oh, not a very reassuring trio, I grant you. *La Misere, la Maladie, et la Mort* (poverty, sickness and death). The rest? Pah! It is imagination, as madame says."

"But," insisted the marquis without looking at Sylvia, who was listening intently, "the malady which originates in some moral suffering, something concealed, a broken ideal, a stifled love—"

"That is a question. You have seen many such affections?" asked Fargeas, with a skeptical air.

"It is sufficient to encounter one to pity it."

M. de Solis had uttered these words in a deep, grave tone; and as Sylvia was near him, he added rapidly in a voice so low that she alone could hear:

"To pity and adore it."

Sylvia did not answer, pretending not to have heard; but this proof of adoration given furtively, imprudently, with that species of defiance which impels those who love to rush into danger; this hurriedly spoken word penetrated her heart. The quick eye of Eva had noted the least sign of emotion on Sylvia's face, and at the same time the almost imperceptible movement of the marquis' lips, while speaking to Mrs. Norton.

The mother also saw, perhaps, for, interrupting the enthusiastic outburst of her son, she said sweetly:

"Well, I have seen many of these true loves and I am an old enough woman to avow that I have heard the rustle of the wings of some of them. But perhaps I shall scandalize Miss Eva, if I tell her that when one swears he will die for her handsome eyes, it is very pretty, very agreeable, very musical, but it is only a phrase ready made, which has little importance. She must pay no attention to it. I know men who have said it a hundred times to a hundred different women, and who are not all dead. Am I taking all the poetry out of your life, my child?" added the marchioness, smiling at Eva.

"Not at all," said Eva concisely. "I should greatly prefer to have a gallant man, in the place of

promising to die for my handsome eyes, as you say, swear to live for me."

"And you are right. It is more difficult," said the marchioness, adding in a low tone to Liliane, "she is ravishing."

"But an American, however. How about the mildew?"

"Oh! I said that it could be cured," replied Madame de Solis.

Doctor Fargeas was visibly interested in this conversation, which, under the guise of an exchange of commonplaces, concealed a secret half divined, a latent suffering; a little of that sickly sentimentalism which he was wont to treat by the antiseptic method, like any other microbe.

"Well," he said, "it is Miss Eva, the least romantic of young women, who has just recited for me a phrase of romance."

"I?"

"You! A man who would swear to live for you and with you. But to live or die, my dear child, is, in these cases, about the same thing. The one has no more importance than the other. And afterward, divorce——"

"Ah! divorce," cried Madame de Solis. "It

seems to me that this is also something American. Divorce, another kind of mil——”

Mrs. Montgomery interrupted her quickly:

“Do not say anything against divorce. I know people who have tried it, and whom you might wound.”

“Well,” asked Fargeas, “what do these people say of it, after their experience?”

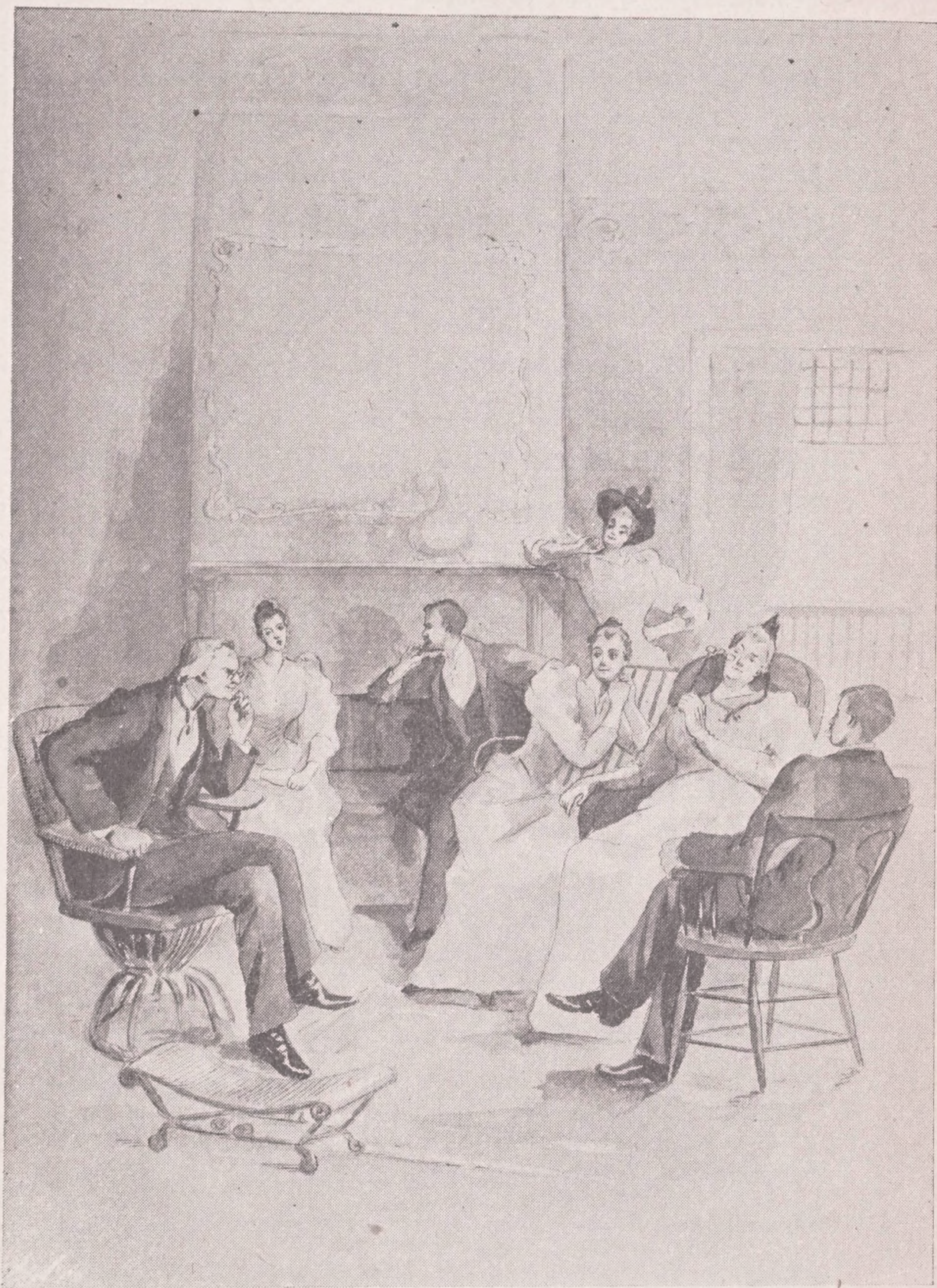
The handsome Liliane seemed to reflect a moment, and then with a gesture expressive of indifference, she said:

“Pah, divorce is like marriage. From afar it is attractive; near by it is——”

“*Dame!*” ejaculated the doctor. “Divorce, then, has its honeymoon. But it wanes like all honeymoons. What I have against divorce is, that it takes away a part, or all of the poetry of marriage—the poetry of a prison if you will. But a dungeon is more picturesque than a lodging room in an inn. Thanks to divorce, marriage has become vulgarized.”

“And yet in our frightful America, as the marchioness would probably term it, divorce has its pleasant side,” said Mrs. Montgomery. “I am tired! I want to escape! My cage is killing me! I open it! I fly! I am happy! I encounter my——”

“My ideal,” said Madame de Solis.



DIVORCE THEN HAS ITS HONEYMOON.

“Retouched;” and Bernière completed the idea.

“Presto! Here is my hand! Oh! no publicity! You please me! I please you. Let us be married! And they set about getting married. Quick! a license! A magistrate! A Protestant minister or a Catholic priest, either is good enough. How do you do! Good-bye! One or two questions, a short address, a certificate or paper—free. A fee to the officiating clergyman. A shake of the hand with the magistrate! And all is done. It is sharp and cold as the blade of a knife! I confess,” added Liliane, “that I have sometimes regretted the pomp and music of a marriage at the Madeleine.”

She seemed to be thinking of some dream not realized in her career of pretty woman. “Yes, the music, the organs, the procession of *all Paris* in the vestry, the sun, the bustle, the notices in the newspapers, another kind of poetry that—the poetry of the news paragraph.”

“And yet,” said Miss Eva in her short, serious and profound manner, “there is something touching and moving in marriage with us, which ought, I think, to take away from the ceremony that steel-like coldness, of which Mrs. Montgomery has just spoken. It is when the minister, opening before those present the Book in which as children we have

all learned our prayers, reads: 'Do you take this man—or this woman—in good as well as in evil report, in health as in sickness, in poverty as in riches,' and the bridal couple respond: 'Yes, I swear it.' ”

There was nothing arid or polemical in the manner of the girl as she recalled the words of the marriage ceremony; nothing of the canting style of the dissenters; on the contrary, there was a real faith, an astonishing honesty of soul. Georges and Sylvia listened, conscience-stricken.

“And they swear, do they?” said Fargeas. “It would be all the same if they did not swear. The bride is lovely. The husband is in love. They would swear to anything you like. And divorce comes, none the less to break the oaths solemnly given, like the dead twigs of the faded orange flowers which formed the bridal wreath. Ah! the to-morrows of those marriage days! To me divorce is not so smile-provoking as it seems to be to Mrs. Montgomery. To me it is frightfully utilitarian, naturalistic and cruel. Divorces are granted because of such or such a mortal sickness; for some suffering which has resulted in madness, for some misfortune which has made the loved one a paralytic. You practical people have invented, among

these reasons for separation, infirmities and misfortunes. You please me, I please you! Very good! But you are sick; you have lost your health, poor man, or you have become aged and infirm, poor woman! Ah! that is another matter. Reason for divorce. I have known, it was in the good times, in the old times, poor souls whom suffering, instead of disuniting, brought closer together. And women made it a matter of pride to be able to say that they had never belonged to more than one living man."

"I have known cases where women were willing to love but one being on earth and that one dead," said the marchioness softly.

Mrs. Montgomery began to laugh.

"All that is very fine. But your French ladies have found an easy means of evading divorce—even before the law. To them divorce is contraband, yet they practically enjoy all its benefits without recourse to the law. I give you my word, I like the American method better. The mildew? Well, call it what you will. But it is more loyal, more honest, more frank."

"Mrs. Montgomery is divorced!" said the marchioness to the doctor, who, a little bored that he had forgotten for a moment, excused himself to Liliane.

“Madame, believe me, I did not wish to—”

“Oh! it is no matter. At heart I am entirely of your opinion. Divorce is like your bromides—you change the prescription but cure nothing. Come, Bernière, we must organize our famous party. It is already four o'clock.”

“I am at your order,” said the viscount.

“Now we will leave you, my dear, said Liliane, holding out her hand to Sylvia. “I will see you again soon. Let us have a little cheerfulness. The marchioness is right. It is imaginary. I shall invent some nonsense to amuse you. They are very proper—my follies—you know. Good-bye for a little time. And no imprudence, mind,” she added in a lower voice.

“You are mistaken,” said Sylvia. “I have committed no imprudence—none.”

“So much the better. Down with the colonel, I say.”

Sylvia disengaged herself from Mrs. Montgomery and passing near Georges, she rapidly pronounced these words:

“I have something to say to you, Monsieur de Solis.”

“To me?”

“Yes. Return in a moment.”

Then Liliane, who had surprised this furtive movement, thought of what Sylvia had just said to her.

"No imprudence!" And it seemed to her that her friend was more indiscreet than she had supposed.

"Will you accompany us, doctor?" said Madame de Solis.

"Yes; I have to make a visit near by. I will come back past the villa to hear how Mrs. Norton is, or rather for the pleasure of seeing her again."

"No ill-will, doctor," said Liliane, holding out her hand to Fargeas as she passed before him.

"No ill-will, madame."

Georges de Solis bowed low as he left Sylvia. He went out with his mother, while Eva, looking a little pale, followed him with her eyes. The young girl when alone with Sylvia said, after a short silence:

"Madame de Solis is charming."

"Yes and her son?" said Sylvia hesitating.

"The marquis?" asked Eva a little surprised.

"Yes."

"He is an accomplished gentleman," said Eva coldly.

"Better than that; he is a nobleman."

Eva smiled lightly and replied in a dry voice:

"Say an honest man and all is said."

Sylvia looked at her niece: "You do not like M. de Solis very much, my dear Eva."

"What makes you think that?"

"The way in which you speak of him."

"I never speak of M. de Solis," she answered shortly.

"Has not Mr. Norton spoken to you of him?"

"My uncle?"

"Your uncle has some plans concerning you, and though he wants to leave you in perfect liberty—"

Eva felt vaguely that in speaking of him Sylvia wanted to know what she thought of M. de Solis.

"Norton!" continued Sylvia, "would certainly be very happy to know that your future were assured by a union—"

"What union?" interrupted Eva. "Has M. de Solis given you authority to speak to me of him?"

"No; I said that your uncle—"

"My uncle is not unaware that my ideas of marriage are very well defined. The oath which I shall take, as I said a moment ago, will be for my whole life, and I will not accept that oath from any man, unless he will love me, as I shall love him, with all his soul. I am not speaking of M. de Solis. I am speaking of myself, who do not love him."

These words were spoken with a firmness which smacked of the truth, and the flash of an involuntary joy shone for a moment in Sylvia's sad eyes.

"You do not love him! Eva. You do not love M. de Solis?"

"No."

But Sylvia insisted, "Look me in the eyes, Eva. You are my sister, my cherished sister. I thought I noticed in your face when I spoke of M. de Solis—"

"I do not love M. de Solis," interrupted the young girl. "And I repeat, I will never be the wife of a man whom I do not love."

This time there was in the firm tone of the response something hostile which disturbed Mrs. Norton.

"What do you mean, my dear Eva? What I said has not wounded you?"

"Wounded? No," replied Eva. "You wanted to know what was in my heart. I have told you frankly, like a sister, since you give me that name. And why should I love M. de Solis? Can he love me?"

"Who told you," and Eva hesitated, "that M. de Solis—"

This time there was a noticeable degree of bitter-

ness in the words of the girl. Sylvia looked at her fine, large, clear eyes, her dark hair and her handsome profile and then said:

“If he *can* love you, with your grace, your beauty, your goodness—”

“Oh! others are handsome, others are good,” said Eva. “Perhaps others love him. And he, do you suppose he cares for me?”

Her eye as she spoke fell upon the bracelet which M. de Solis had admired, but a little while before, admired because it resembled Sylvia's, and then slowly as if talking to herself she said:

“Even while talking to me he was thinking of another!”

“Of another? Eva, child, what do you mean? I wish to know——”

“What? The secret of M. de Solis? Ask him when you see him; he will tell *you* certainly.”

She uttered these last words in a brusque tone, as if she wanted to terminate a conversation which displeased her, which weighed upon her; and in spite of an appeal from Sylvia, she went out, pushing the door shut behind her, and went up to her chamber, her breast shaken with sobs.

“Eva!”

But she was already far away seeking a solitary

spot where without shame she could weep. Did she know why?

Sylvia, alarmed, remained alone.

A disturbing thought had come into her mind, and she still heard in her ears the accent with which Eva had, as it were, lashed her face with these stinging words:

“The secret of M. de Solis? Ask him when you see him.”

“Does she love him?” she asked herself.

CHAPTER X.

M. de Solis was eager to see Sylvia again. Had she not told him a moment before, furtively, that she had something to say to him? When? At the earliest possible moment. Would not a second visit to her on the same day seem out of place? Might it not awaken suspicion? And again, why should it? Was it imprudent to be seen at the villa to-day when Sylvia had asked him to "return in a moment?" Might he not reappear under pretext of bringing a book, or a roll of music? Finally he did not reason at all. There was no obstacle. Ready for the struggle, he had craved this interview, tired of this monotonous existence, of this latent, resigned, concealed love. His love of adventure, his thirst for something new, impelled him to imagine as possible some brusque exodus, a flight with this woman, who hereafter would share his explorations, his dangers and his life. What madness!

However, this thought had haunted him for several days, tortured him. He kept thinking of it on his way to the villa, after having taken his mother home. He had deceived that dear mother

by telling her that he would stop for a little while at the Casino to read the journals, when in fact he was going to return to the adored one, to danger.

Sylvia was still in the large parlor when M. de Solis was announced. She had brought a rocking chair near the window, and reclining in its comfortable arms she was looking at the deep green sea through the dust covered clumps of tamarinds. She received M. de Solis as if she had expected him. Sure that he would come, she had remained there. She reached out to him her hand, and he paused a moment to look at her, glad of the silence which embarrassed the young woman.

"Have you not seen Eva?" she said at length, in despair of a better topic with which to begin the conversation.

"No. Why should I have seen Miss Meredith?"

"An idea. I do not know. Do you not think that for some time, to-day especially, she has shown an aggressive, or a melancholy air? I do not exactly know which would be the better word."

"I had not noticed it," said Georges. "She seemed gay enough yesterday. She talked and laughed as freely as a child."

"Yesterday?" asked Sylvia.

"Yesterday evening."

"You saw her yesterday, you say?" and Sylvia seemed to question Solis with her eyes rather than with her voice.

"I met her at Mother Ruaud's. She came there to bring some food to the poor woman. I went there because I wanted to see whether the little Francis had lied when he talked to us."

"Yes, yes," said Sylvia, who was thinking of Eva and her meeting with Solis.

M. de Solis continued, recalling the incidents of the evening before, the wretched habitation of the fisherman's family, where he had found Miss Meredith, the sick mother and the sodden, imbruted father—

"It was she then," interrupted Sylvia.

"Who?"

"Nothing. I was just thinking of something Mrs. Montgomery has just told me—an absurd story."

"What kind of a story?"

"After all, the colonel, recognizing you, may have thought—I notice that Eva dresses like me of late, and perhaps, who knows—especially when she hoped to meet you—"

"I do not understand you at all. Miss Meredith could not have expected to meet me at all, at the Ruaud's. She was astonished to find me at the bed-

side of the poor woman, where I surprised her in the performance of her charitable act. She blushed as if she had been caught in some unworthy action, poor girl. But what were you saying just now? The colonel? What colonel? Colonel Dickson? An absurd story? He saw me and recognized me? Ah! I understand. He thought it was you. What of it? Suppose it had been you? He ought to know that you assume an *incognito* in order to accomplish your works of charity, as others do to conceal their vices. It is very simple."

"But," said Sylvia, "he seems to have thought it strange that I should go secretly to this poor woman's house at the same hour with you."

"And has he said so? Has he been talking?"

"Evidently, since Mrs. Montgomery has told me of it. Next to knaves, I know nothing more detestable than fools. And knave and fool, who knows whether this man may not be both."

While Sylvia was speaking M. de Solis was nervously pulling the point of his black beard as if he foresaw a calamity and was seeking some means of avoiding it.

"There is one very simple way of answering Colonel Dickson's nonsense," said Sylvia, coldly, "and that is, to tell him the truth."

"The truth, and after that what? If he has invented and peddled about a malicious story at your expense, he will invent a similar one on Miss Eva. That is all."

"It is true," said Sylvia, "but—"

"But what?"

"Miss Eva is free."

"Free! Well," said Solis, indifferently.

Mrs. Norton summoned all her powers to her aid, that she might not betray her emotion, and slowly, as if dropping the words one by one into the marquis' heart, she said:

"She is charming."

Georges repeated the words after her: "She is charming."

"If I had a brother, I could not ask a better wife for him than Miss Meredith."

She spoke with a firmness which betrayed her thought; that thought of sacrifice in which there was a counsel; the idea of a renunciation in which there was almost an order.

"Then it is you who advise me thus?" asked Georges bitterly.

She seemed to unsay her words by a mute gesture.

Solis went on: "From you, too! In a moment

more you will be talking to me about marrying Eva, as Norton has just done. Is it to try me, or to torture me?"

"To torture you? No," she answered sadly.

"Is it to try me? Is it to know whether I love you now as always, as deeply, as madly?"

"You may love Eva. Who knows? One forgets the past."

"Who forgets?" cried Solis gazing fondly at the loved one. "Who? The sages, reasonable beings! Those who can open and close their hearts at will. I am not one of those. How can I forget you when I have seen you again, when I have anew breathed the same atmosphere with you, when I, unhappy, have found you unhappy, suffering with the same grief which is torturing and killing me?"

Sylvia had risen as if to escape from a conversation which she had sought, but which she found painful, dangerous.

"If I suffer," she said, proudly, "do not fear, I am able to bear it."

The marquis shrugged his shoulders. "Able to bear it! and yet you are pale and sad. My anxiety for you increases each day, and I am alarmed every time I see you. I would have liked to fly far away from you, and I ought to have done so, and I would

have done it, I swear to you, if I had found you smiling and happy, and no longer thinking about the past, whose memory I constantly carry about with me. But how can I go, yes, how, when I would have to leave you stricken with some malady which Dr. Fargeas cannot, with all his skill, diagnose, but which is there in your heart, in your memory as well as in mine?"

"Monsieur de Solis!"

"Ah! you will not say it. You will not say that you have not forgotten our poor, young dreams, but I see it, I divine it, I know it."

He had come nearer to her, and was talking close to her ear. He recalled incidents of their past acquaintance.

"Do you remember our talks at your father's house, our hopes, and our oaths of fidelity to each other?"

Through the open window, as if it were a fitting accompaniment to the tender recollections of the pair, there entered the music of a waltz, faint, far off, tender, caressing, borne by the wind in fragments almost imperceptible, and yet exquisite, saddening, like the wraith of a harmony.

Under the impulse of the mood, created, perhaps, in part by the surroundings, Solis felt himself drawn

softly but invincibly down memory's slope, and he talked of things gone, vanished, lost in the mists of time, which to him was the same as death—their first meeting, of that evening when one of Sylvia's friends was married—a friend who had since disappeared—when they, he the Frenchman and she the pretty American, had for a moment found themselves standing under the floral bell destined for the bridal pair, a bell composed of roses, a sort of fragrant cupola, for crowning, like the dome of a church, the first kiss of the husband, of the wife.

How Sylvia had blushed! How pale he had become when friends perceiving it had clapped their hands exclaiming, "They have passed under the floral bell! They are engaged!"

Instead of feeling himself drawn nearer to Sylvia, under those roses, he, poor in purse, felt more than ever the reality of the gulf that yawned between them.

Alas! the aroma of that wedding bell was not to be exhaled, except for the marriage of Norton and Miss Harley.

"Oh! I beg of you, I pray you!" said Mrs. Norton, whom these memories afflicted. Her voice commanded silence, implored it, but with a sort of melancholy satisfaction Georges continued evoking the dead past.

"Ah! I was mad that I did not confess all to your father; that I did not tell him that I should never love any one but you; that I did not bring you away as my living happiness."

"It is all past," said Sylvia, who was still standing as if undecided what course to pursue, endeavoring to master her emotion.

"Remember that to-day you are talking to an honest wife, as you were then talking to an honest girl."

"It is past, yes," said he, "but it is breaking my heart, it is killing you."

There was as much of suffering in the voice of Solis, as of resolution in Sylvia's as she responded:

"No, we do not die of grief, I assure you, Monsieur de Solis."

"Do you mean to say that if one could die of grief, you would be dead? Ah! God! To see you again, and to feel that you are stricken to the heart, to know that you belong to another!"

"Do not speak of Norton. He is the most loyal of men."

"He does not appreciate you. He sees your eyes full of tears and he does nothing to stop their flow. It seems to me that to bring a smile to your lips, I would move heaven and earth."

"Norton is your friend! Do not speak of Norton," said Sylvia firmly.

"Yes!" said the young man, hotly. "He is your husband. When I think of it all, this friendship weighs upon me. I hate it, and I almost hate him."

"Georges!"

"Does he love you as much as I?" cried Solis. "Does he understand you as I do? Has he made of you his single, his only thought in life; always you, nothing but you? I think of nothing but you, Sylvia. I have spent my life in seeking for another aim—another passion. I have taken the memory of you everywhere, and have found you everywhere. In my far-off wanderings you were with me. If I mourned having lost you, I at least had the consolation of thinking that you were happy. But no, you are suffering, unhappy. You weep! You love me!"

"In the name of Heaven, desist!" she said, frightened at his vehemence.

He repeated, solemnly: "You love me, Sylvia, and as there is no happiness for me except with you, so there is none for you except with me—"

She made a movement as if to leave the room. He stopped her.

"Let me—let me speak. Let me tell you all. I have dreamed new dreams since I saw you, but this

time they are practical dreams, whose realization lies within our reach; dreams which can be realized to-morrow if you are willing!"

"What do you mean?"

He was deathly pale, and there was a madness in his eye, the fire of a fever.

"That happiness which we allowed to escape us," he said, in a low voice, "is not entirely in the past. It is in the future, and we can grasp it. It is before us. I adore you, Sylvia! I will love you always! Will you accept my eternal devotion, my existence devoted entirely to your happiness?"

"Your devotion, your existence——"

She stammered as she spoke, yet she understood, though she wished in a vague way that she had not understood.

"To save your life I would give mine a hundred times," he said with a sudden firmness, in the tone of a man who stakes all on the cast of a single die. "You are suffering, dying. I can see only you, can think only of you. I forget the rest of the world. I want you to live. I demand it. Will you?"

It was not the madness of an hour of which Solis was dreaming. It was the sacrifice of an existence, renewed, emancipated, the past suddenly realized. She trembled. She felt the allurements of the temp-

tation. Confused, tottering, she had sunk upon a chair, and with hands clasped, fearing both him and herself, she said in a voice trembling with emotion:

“Monsieur de Solis, I beg you, I conjure you. You do not know how you pain me. Leave me, leave me.”

She understood him; yes she understood only too well what was in his mind. What he had said had planted an agony in her heart, in her brain. She felt the intoxication of a possible liberty.

With the egotism of the lover, the more he saw that she was troubled, the more cruelly he caused to bleed the wound which he had mercilessly laid bare.

“Is it not true,” he said, “that all which surrounds you in your present life oppresses and kills you by inches? Is it not true that your heart is starving? Is it not true, Sylvia, that I have guessed your secret?”

“Not another word,” she cried in a frightened voice. “Not another word, my friend, in the name of that affection of which you are speaking.”

“You see, affection is no longer willing to resign itself, as in the past. In seeing you, true love revolts. I do not speak of Norton. He is a man of honor, the most loyal of men, but, again I say, a man who does not understand you, who lets you

suffer without suspecting the mortal sadness at the bottom of your heart. Every human creature, Sylvia, has the right to live, the right to exist, the right to feel his heart beat in his bosom. We must look our rights in the face, and the life I have lived has given me the cult of the absolute. The absolute in this case is our love, our safety. I love you, and never loved any one except you. I shall love you always, and I wish to give you my life, my whole being. I want to take you away, I do not know where, but where we will not die and where we can love each other always."

"Georges! Georges!" she said influenced, excited by this burst of passion, this madness of the lover. "If you knew what torture you are inflicting upon me under pretext of consoling me and of pitying me!"

"If these are the last tortures you have to bear, what matters it?" cried Georges.

"The last? Alas!"

"You see that everything in you revolts, that you are suffering mortally. For the safety of the human being whom you love most in the world, everything is permitted."

"Everything?"

"To-morrow, this very night, whenever you will,

we will go. A flight, an elopement; call it what they will. We will find some nook in Europe where we will be safe from pursuit. A house somewhere at the end of the sea, there in front of us, beckons us, and there we shall be free."

"Are you mad?"

"Free," he went on, not hearing her expostulation, his eye gleaming, his cheeks feverish, his breath coming and going in quick respiration. "Yes, and if you will, a new life will begin for us, and then what matters the world, what matters others? We are innocent and we are calumniated. And since Dickson's words injure you the world may malign us at will. We shall at least have lived by what to us is life itself; our love."

"Monsieur de Solis! Monsieur de Solis, in the name of your mother—"

"I adore you," he said desperately, "and I wish you to live. I insist upon it that you live. It is for you now, knowing how much I love you, to say whether you love me enough to sacrifice your life to me as I give you mine and forever. Ah! I swear it, forever."

She was pale as a corpse, her mind in a torturing whirl, and yet she was happy; as in some hallucination, some mad dream. She asked herself

whether, after all, what this man was proposing to her was not wisdom. He was a man of honor. To-day, as in the past, he talked to her of an eternity of love. This past to them was like a new springtime, newly crowned with the flowers of hope and promise. M. de Solis would have given her his name in America. He was now offering her all his existence, all his being. She felt herself enveloped in a sort of delicious intoxication, a sort of light dizziness, similar to one of the states of feeling experienced by opium-eaters. A voice, the voice of her husband, Richard Norton, suddenly recalled her to reality.

Norton was but a few steps away. He was giving an order to or asking a question of a servant. Norton! The husband! Law! Duty!

"It is he," she said.

"Norton? I do not want to see him;" and with an instinctive movement he started toward the door opposite the one by which Richard would enter.

"Remorse already?" said Sylvia sadly, and with a tinge of bitterness.

"No, jealousy," he answered, almost fiercely. "We will meet again."

Sylvia, left alone, watched the door through which M. de Solis had just passed. At the same time she could hear the voice of Norton. He was

about to enter. She felt a sensation of depression, a kind of moral collapse. It seemed to her that Georges had inflicted upon her a real material wound. And yet how he had talked! What temptations, what beautiful dreams!

"He has given me pain," she thought. And yet she would not have had him keep silent.

She braced herself against the trial to come when Norton entered.

With pale features, a preoccupied air, almost gloomy, he looked about the room as if he expected to find some one, and asked:

"Who was here?"

"Here?" she reiterated.

"I heard a voice other than yours."

"It was M. de Solis," she answered.

"Ah!"

Norton was silent a moment, then suddenly he said:

"And he left when I came in?"

"Perhaps he did not know it was you."

"Indeed!" and Norton's voice had a vibrant ring in it which was not pleasant to hear.

"You are not accustomed to lying, my dear Sylvia, you are very pale."

"Why should I lie?"

“What had M. de Solis to talk about?” asked Richard, suspiciously.

“I do not know—nothing—insignificant matters.” She was trying, stammeringly, to frame some evasion.

“Insignificant!” repeated Norton, ironically. “Insignificant—necessarily. And all that M. de Solis said to you was entirely indifferent, was it—indifferent, absolutely?”

“Why do you ask me that? Why do you talk to me of M. de Solis?”

“Oh, nothing!” said Norton, trying meanwhile to maintain a calm bearing, in spite of his fast rising anger. “Because I have just heard by accident some gossip at the Casino, and that, too, by people who did not suspect that I was there or that I could hear. Everybody at Trouville does not know me.”

“And what were those people saying of M. de Solis?” asked Sylvia, preparing herself to receive, like a dagger stroke in the heart, this new calumny.

“That concerns you little. But I have to announce, my dear Sylvia, a piece of news to which I fear you will be less indifferent than to the conversation regarding M. de Solis.”

She waited silently.

“A disagreeable piece of news,” added the husband.

"What is it?"

"My business makes my immediate presence in New York necessary. We start day after to-morrow."

"Day after to-morrow?"

"Saturday," he said, coldly. Sylvia simply uttered an "Ah!" as if she were resigned.

"And never to come back to France," said Norton, slowly, looking his wife squarely in the face with his steely gray eyes.

She could not be deceived as to the meaning of these last words, and she replied with a little irony in her tone, which was otherwise full of sadness:

"Your manner of announcing your intention of never returning to France resembles a threat. I have not been accustomed to hearing you speak in that tone."

"I thank you for having noticed it," answered Norton. "But each day we discover something new to which we have to become accustomed, if we can. I have become accustomed to everything and can bear no more."

"You speak in enigmas. I do not understand you at all."

"It is not necessary that you should understand, provided you will go with me."

He walked up and down the room, mechanically pulling and twisting his fingers until they cracked, his great height a little bent as if he felt an unexpected weight laid upon his broad shoulders.

“But, in truth,” said Sylvia, “you seem very much less interested in returning to America to settle your business affairs than in making me leave France.”

He stopped short, and with a smile said coldly: “You seem to understand perfectly, my dear Sylvia.”

Sylvia tossed her pretty head proudly, and the melancholy expression of her face gave way to one of aggressiveness, almost indignation.

“I understand that some absurd, odious—worse than that—insulting suspicion has taken possession of you. I have enough to bear of my own, without your augmenting my sufferings by a doubt which outrages me.”

“I have spoken to you about nothing. I have simply alluded to rumors, absurd and odious, as you say, and you call that an outrage.”

“It happens, by chance also, that I know the reports which you may have heard.”

“Who has told you of them? M. de Solis?” said Norton, whose impatience was visibly increasing.

"Please let M. de Solis rest. At each word you speak to me you cast M. de Solis in my teeth."

"I speak of him much less than you think of him, my dear friend," said Richard bitterly.

"I?"

"M. de Solis, I ought to remember, was your father's guest three or four years ago."

"Yes," she responded simply.

"M. de Solis was in love with you. M. de Solis might have married you."

"Yes."

"And if he had asked your hand, you would have given it to him?"

"Yes," she said shortly.

"Then this melancholy, these tears, these sighs which I see daily and which make me so unhappy have for cause, that you are still thinking of M. de Solis, that you have loved him always, and do not love me at all?"

Sylvia answered with the same loyal frankness:

"I swore to be your wife and I will give you all my life, as you have given me your name."

"An oath! By Heavens!" said Norton, whose tense nerves seemed twisted and knotted. "But we forget love promises, why not as easily forget those, which marriage imposes? Imbecile! Fool

that I was! I thought I was loved! I have surrounded myself with luxury, only to please my wife. I, who might live on bread and rice. I have coveted palaces and an insensate wealth, for whom? For this woman! Yes, for you—I the husband, a mere, working machine, and she—she—”

“I asked nothing of you, and I am grateful to you for all your devotion, Richard,” said Sylvia deliberately.

He had resumed his nervous walk up and down the room, and, across the table, which separated them, Sylvia could see his huge frame, now outlined against the background of the sea, now plunged in the obscurity of the vast chamber. More and more excited, he was coming and going, occasionally stopping in his progress to speak to her in broken sentences:

“Grateful! Ah, yes, without doubt. Grateful as you would be to a porter who looks after your baggage during a journey! It is not your gratitude I want, it is your love!”

“I have loyally kept the promise I loyally gave you,” she said again.

“Yes; and yet the idlers and the gossipers, it appears, know of your love for M. de Solis so well, that they talk openly of it, and just now, in a public

Casino on the sea beach, an allusion to it has come to me like a blow in the face, like a stab to the heart."

"Do you hold me responsible for the idle talk of people whom I do not know and who do not know me?"

"Besides," said he, "the idlers may tomorrow, if they like, speak freely of the American Norton and of the departure of himself and wife. For I have already given it out that we are going to leave France. We can await the steamer at Havre. There is no need to stay at Trouville any longer. Be so kind as to give the necessary orders—"

"Now?" she asked in astonishment.

"At once; our berths are secured. They are the same we occupied on the *Normandie* in coming to France."

"It is impossible for me to make my adieus to the few scattered friends who are here—"

"Your friends? Why, Eva will accompany us."

"Mrs. Montgomery?"

"You will meet her some day again in America."

"It is folly, I tell you," said Sylvia. "If this departure is not a sudden whim, if your caprice becomes a tyranny, then it is useless to insist. I shall not go."

She had summoned all her nervous resolution

which she put into this refusal, and Norton knew the energy of this creature, ordinarily so frail and passive, too well not to fear that her decision would be final.

“Nevertheless I shall be on my way in three days, and I pray you—I pray you, Mrs. Norton,” he said insistingly, “not to let me go alone.”

“I did not ask to come to France. I will not leave France for no better reason than that some idler has taken the liberty to mention my name. Besides, so far as the Dicksons are concerned—you see I know who it is who have been making free with my name—to leave France now would be the same as a flight. They would believe that their calumny had reached a vital place and that they had forced me to a retreat. No, I will not go.”

“Sylvia,” said Norton, and his face, a moment before ashy pale, now became purple.

“Well?” she answered calmly.

“You do not know me. You have always found me submissive to your caprices, humble as an infant before you. You imagine that I can renounce what I have willed to do, when my mind is really made up. You forget that during all my life I have accomplished all I set out to do. I am not romantic like M. de Solis. I am a man who knows his own mind and executes his will. Well, I swear to you,

Sylvia, that I do not wish you to stay another day at Trouville, and that you accompany me to America when I go."

The young woman for a moment looked at this colossus, whom she felt to be beside himself with fury, then slowly with an exasperating sweetness in her tone she answered:

"Your will, when it becomes an insult, is powerless against mine. Powerless! You want to go away from France because it pleases you to be suspicious of me. Accuse me, insult me, but I shall not go!"

Still menacingly he repeated as a moment before the loved name:

"Sylvia!"

Then pausing before the clear, calm, yet sad gaze of his wife, he exclaimed passionately:

"Ah! no, no! You want to madden me to extremities. Do you wish me to believe all?"

"All what? All that calumny has picked up, I know not where? Absurdities, or infamies?"

"Well, yes, it is folly. Yes, it is absurd, I know it," he said. "But I do not wish you to stay here. I am unjust, I am brutal, be it so. It is the Yankee in me. It is the savage coming to the surface. But after all, have I not given a proof of coolness which astonishes me? To think that with these hands—

and he showed his huge muscular, powerful hands—I did not strangle the backbiters who were sneeringly relating the adventures of the mistress of the Villa Normande. I was ready to spring upon them like a tiger, and I do not doubt I would have caused a great scandal—a misfortune even—when this thought came to me, that a scandal was more to be dreaded than the vilification, the calumnies of these heartless tale-bearers. In taking notice of the story I would have given it an unmerited importance. I would have given it a new impetus, instead of which I prefer to let it drag upon the earth like a collapsed balloon. But coolness is not my strong point. You must have noticed it, Sylvia. I feel as if I were suffocating. I have before me visions which madden me. You must understand me, Sylvia, you must excuse and pardon me.”

He repeated in a sharp, commanding tone: “You *must* follow me.”

“It is then an order?”

“An order or a prayer, it matters little.”

“It matters so much that I might have yielded to a prayer, but I shall not obey an order.”

“Never?”

“Never.”

“Ah! miserable woman!” said Norton, his face

scarlet with anger. "And who shall prove to me that those wretches were not telling the truth and that you do not desire to stay here to be with your lover?"

"My lover! It is an infamy, and what you have just said is a lie," cried Sylvia.

"He was here a moment ago. He fled like a guilty thing before my approach. Where is the lie? On my lips, or on yours? Did you not confess to me just now that you loved him? Yes or no?"

"It was not a confession, it was the truth," she said, resuming her proud calm.

"The truth. The truth of the past and the truth of to-day. It means that you love him always?"

"Always! Yes, I shall love him always," she said, drawing herself up to her full height; "and what then?"

"You dare, oh, you dare," Norton stammered chokingly.

"I love him and yet you have lied none the less. I love him and yet the cravens you speak of have calumniated me. I love him and yet I am an honest woman."

He listened, wild with anger. He was afraid he should be tempted to spring upon and strangle her in the delirium of his rage.

"An honest woman whose name is Norton," he said. "Call Eva. Give your orders, for I tell you we are going to leave France."

As she did not move he stepped to the electric bell near the mirror and pressed upon the ivory button.

"You can go if you like," said Sylvia. "As for me, I shall remain."

She was leaning upon the table to keep from falling. Her face was livid and her lips trembled. Her eyes alone seemed to be living.

"I am going," said Norton, "and I shall take you with me."

"By force? That is possible. You could handcuff me, you know."

At this moment a domestic entered, followed by Dr. Fargeas, who came in with a sprightly air.

On seeing him Norton made a sign to the valet, who withdrew.

At the first glance the doctor divined that some sort of electric shock had just been produced between these two beings—moral storms have also their smell of sulphur—and going to Sylvia who was almost fainting he said:

"What is the matter, madame? Well, what now?"

"Nothing, nothing, doctor," she said. She tried to smile, but tottered.

"How? Nothing! Why it is a crisis." He looked to Norton for an explanation.

"What is it?" he asked in a low tone.

"I start for Havre this evening, and for New York in three days," answered Richard, coldly, "and Mrs. Norton refuses to accompany me."

"She refuses? And she is quite right to refuse. Do you want to kill her?"

"To kill her?" repeated Norton. A sudden anguish appeared in his voice and almost strangled him.

Fargeas made Sylvia sit down, and quickly breaking the neck off a bottle of nitrite of amyle, he poured the contents upon a handkerchief, which he asked her to respire. She thanked him with a look, while the doctor, turning to Norton, said:

"Ah, that depends upon you. Her nerves are in such a state! If you love her——"

"If I love her? What an irony," thought Richard.

The doctor continued: "You have confided the care of her health to my hands. Very well! A departure with a barometric depression, and the direction of the wind announced in the weather bulletins to-day! Never! I am opposed to it."

"I kill her," thought Norton. It seemed to him

that a great black chasm was yawning before him, and that he wanted to plunge into it, to bury himself, to disappear with that adored one who was cherishing in her heart the name and image of another.

Suddenly into the silence of the villa there came a burst of noise as when the director of the theatre gives the signal to the orchestra. There was a chorus of shouts and laughter, and a whirlwind of gayety entered the rooms. A troop of people, led by Mrs. Montgomery, rushed forward, and similar to the *farandole* of the *Midi*, unwound itself up the stairways and through the halls. The handsome Liliane was armed with a wand, striped in white and red, and was accompanied by her husband, red-faced and out of breath. Bernèire gave his hand to Arabella, who was closely followed by the Colonel and Mrs. Dickson, the little Jewess and her father, the big apoplectic banker, and a crowd of other self-invited fools who came in the American fashion to make up this *surprise party*, an institution which recalled their dear America, and all were laughing, shouting and making the air ring with their forced gayety.

“Hip, hip, hurrah! a surprise party!” shouted Liliane. “Let us make ourselves at home.”

“To the piano, Arabella! to the piano,” said Liliane, as if commanding an assault.

“Willingly.”

Miss Dickson took off her gloves, sat down to the instrument, while the colonel said to Norton:

“What a pity! She has forgotten her violoncello.”

This brusque, stunning invasion did not displease Fargeas. It brought to Sylvia a sudden reaction of which her nerves had need. While Mrs. Norton was trying to regain her self-possession, to smile at the irruption, to show a placid countenance to these rattle-brains, who by right of a fantastic conquest were taking possession of her home, Norton composed his features, feeling that the Dicksons had come, not only as idlers bent on amusement, but as spies.

Eva, attracted by the noise, came in her turn to join the rollicking band.

“See our surprise party,” said Liliane, laughing, as Eva entered.

“It is an American amusement,” added Made-moiselle Offenburger. “It ought to please you, Miss Eva. It is not equal to anthropology as a study but it is very droll—original!”

Sylvia made an effort to appear cheerful, but she remained a little pale.

At sight of her the colonel, with an affectation of interest, said to Dr. Fargeas:

“But see, doctor, look at Mrs. Norton, how pale she is!”

“What? Mrs. Norton?” said Richard, coldly. “She is a little tired, that is all.”

“It is nothing,” added Sylvia.

“Come, come, Sylvia, let us have a little fun,” said the handsome Liliane; and raising her wand of command, her wand bestriped and beribboned, she cried joyously in her clear, musical voice:

“Arabella, let us have ‘Milligan’s March.’ We will all join in. Hip, hip, hurrah!”

Then while Miss Arabella played in crescendo the English air upon the piano, an air in which the notes seemed to leap, to hurry full of quivers and staccatos, Bernière and Mrs. Montgomery sang an accompaniment, stopping now and then to laugh. Miss Eva examined in turn the members of the party: The colonel who, with the gravity of a clergyman, was beating time, while his wife was wiping her face with her handkerchief; the little Offenburger, who was talking with her father—the latter imitating the movements of the bass drummer, while Montgomery was whispering in Norton’s ear. Then the glance of the young girl fell upon the sad face of Sylvia seated by Dr. Fargeas, who was gravely shaking his head. Eva herself was serious,

and her heart grew heavy at the sound of all this noise which she somehow thought had a false note, at this villa, where to-day for the first time she had wept—where she was conscious of something like the bitter perfume of tears; and sadly she said to herself:

“If the Marchioness de Solis were here she would certainly say that all the American women are mad. “Yes, she would really say it.”

In the meantime, Arabella was playing furiously upon the piano and Liliane, between two waves of her wand, said to Bernière:

“We will pillage the buffets in a moment, for luncheon. To-day Sylvia is not the mistress here. Dispossession for the public amusement is justifiable. Hurrah for the surprise party!”

“The mildew,” thought Eva.

CHAPTER XI.

Georges de Solis, in leaving the villa had, by mere chance, taken a course which lay through the less frequented streets. Mechanically he turned his steps toward the beach, indifferent to the gay medley of bright toilettes and many colored parasols, which made bright spots here and there on the sands. He followed the plank walk, still thinking of what he had just said, of what he had dared to say to Sylvia.

He was stifling morally. Up to this moment his life had been bounded by his duties and a love. He had not abused his passion in expending it in ordinary caprices. It was still virgin, intact, and he wanted to employ it as a saving power in snatching this woman from a dull prison, from a slow but certain death.

Should he fly with her? Yes, since it was his destiny to be a wanderer, since the universe opened to him its infinite vistas. But Madame de Solis, his mother! Richard Norton, the husband. He would not think of them. He must banish them from his mind. He wanted only to see Sylvia. He would

think only of her. A fever had mounted to his brain making him blind to all which was not Sylvia, to everything which was not his love.

He walked for a long time in this state, stopping mechanically before the shooting gallery, seeming spellbound by the perforated targets; in reality seeing nothing and thinking of nothing but his love. He went home at last, and dined with the marchioness, who noticed that he was thoughtful and nervous. Toward dark, contrary to his habit, he prepared to go out again.

"Are you ill?" asked his mother, as he was getting his hat and cane.

"No; why do you ask?"

"You are pale and you look sad and troubled."

"I am not sad; I am a little nervous. The extreme heat has been oppressive. The air from the sea will do me good."

He was visibly agitated. He had but one thought now. To realize this madness, about which he had spoken to Sylvia, as of a dream. A flight in 1891, an elopement as in the romantic period, would seem strange, almost ridiculous and not very *fin de siècle*. But explorers and seekers after the unknown are perhaps the last of the romantics. To brave danger, to fly in this mad brusque way pleased him. But

how should he arrange the details and time of the departure?

And then, was she entirely willing? He had seen her tremble in listening to his impassioned words, thrill with the temptation of liberty and love. She still loved him, and it was because he had the sensation that she had remained faithful, and had reciprocated his love that he found in himself the audacity to carry out his insane project. He knew the consequence would be a rupture with the world. But would she have the same boldness as he? Would not some reflection as to the consequences make her pause at the last moment?

Unconsciously he had entered the Casino, feeling that his over-wrought nerves had need of the noise and movement of a restless crowd as a calming influence.

The crowd was great. They were dancing in one of the halls. In another the gaming tables were arranged, and they were playing roulette. In passing from the dancing hall to the gaming rooms, M. de Solis almost ran into the handsome Arabella Dickson, who was promenading, upon the arm of her father. Instinctively, the crowd parted before the admirable young woman and the gigantic, red-bearded American. Paul de Bernière was walking

behind them talking to a gentleman, whose style was very pure, very correct. He wore a white cravat with a diamond pin, and a gardenia at his button-hole. It was the artist, Harrison, the first husband of Mrs. Montgomery. It was an artist in the dress of a diplomat. He was bald, but had side whiskers of an interminable length.

On seeing M. de Solis, Arabella uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. She stopped and held out her hand. She was delicious with her tawny hair drawn up from the neck. A little sailor hat of white straw was perched coquettishly upon her head. She wore a skirt and waist of some white material, the latter sitting so closely to her form that all the contours of bust, waist and hips were admirably shown.

"M. de Solis," she said, "we were so sorry not to see you at the Villa Norton this evening."

"Very sorry indeed," said the colonel.

"It was a charming surprise party gotten up by Mrs. Montgomery. She understands these little parties, does she not, Mr. Harrison?"

"Yes, she understands how to manage such things!" replied the first husband, indifferently.

"I had hoped to see you, Monsieur de Solis," added Arabella, smiling.

"I go out very little, mademoiselle. It is by chance that I am here now."

The colonel nodded his head and stroked his long beard, saying:

"You go out very little. You do not come to the Casino very often, but--"

He stopped, for there was something in the eye of M. de Solis which warned him not to proceed.

All the contempt which Georges felt in his heart for the calumny which had been uttered against Sylvia rose within him and blazed in his eye, and with feverish eagerness he seized the occasion for an explanation which this encounter with the colonel offered.

"I would like a word with you, colonel."

"Willingly, my dear marquis."

"I should like to speak with you alone, with your permission, mademoiselle."

Arabella smiled assent.

"M. de Bernière will serve me as cavalier," she said gaily.

The colonel, still stroking his beard, followed Georges into one of the corners of the room, where the good bourgeois were sweltering in upholstered arm-chairs.

"Sir," said the young man, coming directly to

the matter in hand, "you have been making remarks which do not please me, about myself and another person whom neither you nor I have the right to name."

"Indeed!" said the colonel, straightening his gigantic form to its full height.

"I say that you have slandered the most respectable of women and you have associated my name with hers in your calumnies. Do you know what we call such an act in French?"

"I know the French language," said the colonel coldly, "and I will spare you the trouble of consulting your dictionary. I have said nothing which was not germane to a conversation of the seaside. I may have spoken—in the interest of the health of a person who appears to be very dear to you—of too frequent walks along the beach—at night—when one was ill——"

"Well, sir," interrupted Solis, "in the future I forbid you to interfere with me or the person to whom you have just made allusion."

"You forbid—me?" said the American, scanning the words and accenting each syllable strongly.

"I have said so."

"By what right, sir?"

The colonel's attitude was so fiercely proud that

one might have supposed his courage due in part to a plentiful admixture of cocktails.

“By what right?” said M. de Solis. “By the right I assume.”

“Oh,” said the colonel, slowly, “my countrywoman has smitten you terribly. It is easy to understand, though. She is devilishly pretty.”

He lifted his hand to stroke his beard with a mechanical gesture. Georges seized his wrist, and with his eyes close to the colonel's he said:

“Silence, sir! You are a coward!”

“I hope you are not one, sir,” replied the colonel, disengaging himself.

“At your orders, sir!”

“Very good, sir,” answered Dickson, rejoining his daughter, who was talking with Bernière. The latter had not lost a movement in the conversation between Solis and the colonel, and he suspected that something unpleasant, and possibly serious, had passed between them.

“Well,” said the colonel to himself, as he walked back to where his daughter was waiting for him, “Arabella may have some difficulty in catching the marquis after all this; but we shall see. Who knows?”

“Has there been a quarrel between you and the

colonel?" Bernière asked, as soon as he was alone with Georges.

"Oh, a mere nothing."

"A provocation?"

"No, an explanation," said Solis. "I shall count on you, for there may be consequences. Ah! you must notify Dr. Fargeas. And not a word to my mother! I will go and embrace her. Poor woman!"

"The devil!" said Bernière, trying to turn the matter into a pleasantry. "You are expeditious; you do not intend to lose any time, evidently. You are like an express train with all steam on."

The evening at Villa Norton was silent and sad, and the next day was to be more anxious still. Whether Colonel Dickson had revealed at the Casino the secret of his altercation with M. de Solis, whether in conferring with his friends, the artist Harrison, before all others, he had not imposed silence upon his witnesses, or, finally, whether he felt an interest in hearing his name coupled with that of the marquis, at all events the incident of the evening before was the gossip of the beach next morning.

The echoes of this rumor penetrated even to the Villa Norton. Mrs. Montgomery had gone there, officious and nervous, very early, and when Dr. Fargeas arrived to learn of Sylvia's health he experi-

enced a singular sensation. It seemed to him that the very furniture had an unaccustomed dramatic air. Inanimate things have malice; they also have in some sort the power of divination.

The doctor took care not to question Mrs. Norton, whom he found very nervous, but more firm, as if she had made an effort to control herself. Norton was absent, and the doctor limited himself to a prescription harmless enough; and, as he descended from Sylvia's room, he met Miss Meredith at the foot of the staircase. She, also, seemed visibly anxious.

"Well, doctor? And Sylvia—how is she?" asked Eva.

"Oh, nervous as usual, but evidently more energetic than yesterday. I should say that she had been braced up by some excitement."

"An excitement?" queried the girl. "I do not know what excitement. There is nothing new here."

"Nothing!"

He looked at Eva, who was pale, and shook his head in a manner at once knowing and indulgent.

"I would never advise you to try to play a comedy, my dear child. You do not know how."

"Why, doctor——"

"If Mrs. Norton is—how shall I express it—braced up, you are very nervous."

"And why should I be nervous?" asked Eva, tossing her pretty brown head and trying to smile.

"Oh! as to that, I do not know, I am sure," said Fargeas. He added kindly: "Perhaps you have heard of the rumored duel between Colonel Dickson and M. de Solis."

And, as Eva started involuntarily, he added:

"There now, don't be disturbed. M. de Solis has had many such affairs. He is a master with the sword and pistol, too. There is nothing to fear for him."

Eva answered slowly:

"Who told you that I fear anything on M. de Solis' account?"

"Eh? What!" exclaimed the doctor. After a moment's silence he said: "Well, let us suppose I was mistaken. Perhaps, then, it is Colonel Dickson in whom you are interested?"

There was a shrug of Eva's shoulders, accompanied by a gesture expressive of a wish merging into a threat, as she answered:

"The colonel! the colonel! Ah, if one could only have his just deserts, the colonel——"

"Very good," said the doctor. "It is as I supposed."

He was sure now that she was anxious about the

marquis. Poor little one! He now noticed for the first time that she was dressed for going out, even to the hat which crowned her luxuriant brown hair. He asked if she would accompany him.

“Yes, with pleasure, doctor.” She had need of air, of movement. She wanted to walk, to tire herself, to exercise her nerves. In walking toward the city the doctor watched her out of the corner of his eye, pale, deliciously beautiful. Suddenly he noticed her blush very red, and she cried, on seeing some one approaching them in the distance:

“M. de Solis!”

When they came up with Georges, the doctor held out his hand sayin

“Well, my dear marquis, I congratulate you.”

“On what?” asked Solis, who had saluted Eva.

“Why, they are talking of nothing else—of your meeting with Colonel Dickson.”

“I have had no meeting with Colonel Dickson.”

“Then—that duel—is it over with?” asked Eva, hesitating.

“Pretty nearly,” said Georges.

“You will not fight?”

A sign from the doctor made Georges understand that he must deny everything.

“There will be no duel, mademoiselle,” he said smiling. “Everything has been arranged.”

“Oh! how glad I am. I was so troubled.”

“And yet a moment ago, you told me that you hadn't the shadow of an interest—”

“Oh! that was a moment ago,” she said smiling and blushing.

Fargeas took her hands in a fatherly manner.

“I told you, my dear child, you could never, never play comedy. Good-bye now, mademoiselle. My visits to my patients may be of little utility, but they must be made all the same.”

Bowing to M. de Solis, the old doctor went off in the direction of the city, leaving Eva and the marquis talking in the bright morning air, within a few steps of the beach.

The young girl was looking at the marquis with an air of serene, happy content.

“Do you know that I am very happy?” she said. “I think a duel is so absurd. And when I think that Colonel Dickson, who is really redoubtable, might. It was he, was it not, who refused the duel?”

“You may be assured, mademoiselle, that it was not I,” answered Georges.

“According to that he has done well. I have been told that he accomplished wonders during the

war of secession; and then in the Indian wars, also. Yes, with Buffalo Bill. He was a hero, it appears. But I doubted it a little, I assure you. I do not know why," she said, laughing, "but I doubted it. Now, however, I doubt it no longer."

"Why?"

"Because a man who has the colonel's terrible reputation, and who does not hesitate to recognize his faults, is truly an excellent man. In my opinion Colonel Dickson has to-day given proof of loyalty. He has acknowledged his wrong, has he not, Monsieur de Solis?"

"Assuredly!"

"It was, of course, villainous to accuse Sylvia, who is goodness and honor personified. Oh! you see that I know all; and as I know that the colonel on leaving you last evening at the shooting gallery, before everybody broke any number of plaster dolls, you can imagine in what a state of terror I passed the night. Do I bore you, talking here in the open air, as the painters say? I am not making you lose your time, am I?"

"Oh! mademoiselle!"

"So much the better then. You will have to endure me a little longer. You have given me enough anxiety. You will think me absurd, I dare

say. An American girl ought not, you think, to have the subtle sensibilities of the French woman. Well, I could not help it. I could see you there, standing before Colonel Dickson's pistol—"

"And already reduced to the state of one of the shattered plaster dolls?" said the marquis. "But I can defend myself better than the poor plaster dolls. Besides, it is my belief that in an encounter of this kind, right is always triumphant over wrong."

"Oh, that is only a superstition."

"Better than that, it is a conviction."

"Conviction, then, is an excellent thing when it is backed by a good deal of skill. At all events you gave me a great deal of anxiety."

She certainly was charming. Her joyous chatter, her youthful frankness, the clear, honest look she fixed upon him, this cordiality of comradeship, troubled or rather attracted Solis, and he looked at her tenderly, a little astonished, as one might suddenly become interested in a landscape unnoticed before.

"I would like," he said, "to have a better right to merit your anxiety on my account."

"How a better right? Do you mean that you would like to run other and greater dangers? To

what good end, since the result would be the same? I am practical, you see."

She was walking by his side now, her handsome dark face set off by a feverish flush, and the wind blowing upon her brow lifted and disarranged the soft curling masses of her hair, which Georges had not before remarked, and which gave her a charming air of coquetry.

It was a pleasure to him to have this child speak to him, and turning to her he said:

"Then, if Col. Dickson had treated me as he did the little plaster dolls in the shooting gallery, it would have been disagreeable to you?"

"I have told you how I felt. You are not going to ask me to say it over again? You are no longer interesting, now, not at all."

"Then to merit your consideration, Miss Eva, one should always be exposed to some danger."

She shook her head prettily.

"Ah! no. It is not necessary that people should be in extraordinary situations to merit my esteem and love. Moreover I am the least romantic person you can find, and the idea never came into my head that in carrying supplies to the poor Ruaud family—that in a mere errand of charity—any one could discover a romance."

"The world is uncharitable," said M. de Solis sadly. "It must have its daily rations of calumny."

Eva pouted her lips and said firmly:

"Oh! the world—the world. The world is not after all the whole world. You are wrong in paying too much attention to it. For my part, the world may say what it likes. It matters little to me whether the world approves me or not, provided that in my own conscience and soul I am satisfied with my conduct."

"But if Colonel Dickson had said of you——"

"What he said of Sylvia? Well, I should have begged you to let him go on saying it. Rather than that we——"

She stopped and Georges completed her thought.

"Rather than that I should have the right to defend you, you mean."

"That is still a question. An honest man always has the right to defend an honest woman whose character has been assailed."

"Even where a young girl is concerned?"

"Especially when it is a question of a young girl. But if I were concerned it would be an entirely different matter. As what people might say of me is of infinitely less importance than the existence of some one for whom I may have a—friendship. I

should have conjured you to let Dickson and Miss Dickson and all the Dicksons in the world alone. What would have given me anxiety would have been, not at all a word more or less absurd, or more or less malicious; it would have been the pistol shot of the redoubtable colonel. Oh! I am aware that I am trampling upon your warlike prejudices. Observe that I love, I honor, I admire courage, but I like to see it properly employed."

Georges listened with increasing surprise, much interested, charmed even by this frankness, this exquisite contempt for prejudices, these clear ideas of a girlish brain; and turning toward her he said:

"You are entirely original, Miss Eva."

"You may call it eccentric; don't be too modest."

"And what do you call courage well employed?"

In her turn, she now looked at him, surprised at the curiosity she had suddenly awakened in him.

And then she spoke from the fullness of her heart, and he read as in an unknown book, in this soul as clear as the waters of a mountain brook.

"What is courage well employed? I do not know exactly. It cannot be defined. The man who saves another's life, or who defends his country, or who devotes his whole existence to a generous or useful end. Am I clear? Such a one performs an

act of courage. Courage it is when you go into the rice-fields of Asia to seek what? I do not know, but some truth, some fact, the discovery of which is to benefit the race—to initiate some progress.”

She stopped; her face now became serious.

“Perhaps I ought to say *to forget* rather than to seek.”

Solis felt himself affected by the sound of her voice which had suddenly become sad.

“Forget? Forget what?”

“Well, good-bye, Monsieur de Solis. I am so glad to know that this unhappy affair is ended.”

She extended her hand as if to take her leave, but Georges insisted upon an explanation of her last words.

“You said that in traveling, I was trying perhaps to forget something. Forget what? What do you mean?”

Her eyes met his frankly and fearlessly. “Oh, I never have any reserves when the secret in question relates only to myself. But it is a matter of the secret of another person.”

“A secret? What secret?” Instinctively his hand sought to retain the young girl.

“You see, Monsieur de Solis,” she said, trying to laugh, “that I am joking. Let me go. There is no

secret. It is nothing. Thank God, there will be no duel."

"And suppose there should be one?" said the marquis.

All the gayety of the poor child vanished. She became as pale as when Dr. Fargeas had questioned her a little while before.

Then she said in a sharp voice: "What you said to me a moment ago, before the doctor—look at me—is not true. You are going to fight with Dickson?"

"Miss Eva, I pray you, for my sake and for—hers."

"Ah, yes! Sylvia! Always Sylvia. And you let me believe that all was over, that I might reassure myself. You told me so. Ah! that was not right. If you knew how much suffering you have caused me."

In her eyes there were tears which she tried to hide, and she leaned upon her umbrella to keep from falling. He was stupefied. He tried to take her in his arms, fearing she would fall, but she had already dried her eyes.

"Oh! It is nothing. Nothing at all! I beg your pardon for this little attack. Ridiculous, and especially in the middle of the street. You see it has passed. Why, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing! Only when I look at you I do not seem to know you."

"Oh! you see I have nerves also, like Sylvia. Good-bye."

He stopped her, feeling that he had given her pain.

"I ask your pardon, mademoiselle."

"Oh! I pardon you. You did not know."

She did not this time give him her hand as she had done before, but went away rapidly, walking fast, feeling that she was stifling. On arriving at the villa she tried to compose her face. When she entered she found herself face to face with Richard Norton, who was about to go out.

Norton was cold, pale, and had in his look an expression of melancholy which was not habitual to him. Eva was struck with the air of kindly sadness, with which he welcomed her. Whence came this expression? Why was his face so anxious? Norton felt that the news of the duel between M. de Solis and Colonel Dickson might alarm the young girl, but he wished neither to question her nor to give explanations. He contented himself with a few vague phrases, spoken in a paternal tone, and recommended, as Dr. Fargeas might have done in the case of Sylvia, a little repose.

Eva went up to her room, trying to compose herself.

Norton had made up his mind that he would go straight to Georges de Solis. He wished to talk with the man who had been his friend. Should he find the marquis?

Georges had reached his lodgings, repeating to himself what Eva had just said to him. He felt, in recalling the words of the little American, a peculiar, a bizarre pleasure. The frankness of the young girl had charmed him. It was not that he hesitated, no—the image of Sylvia was always present in his thought—but he was troubled. He would have liked, out of pure curiosity, doubtless, as Bernière might have done out of dilettantism, to know this child's heart to the bottom. She was but a child, but so determined, so exquisite with her little bursts of heroic resolution.

Then he began again to think of Sylvia, of that mad but irresistible idea of flight which he had poured into the ear of his adored one. A folly—be it so. Is not what we call insanity sometimes supreme wisdom? It seemed to him that an inner voice—his own conscience—counseled him to take this step.

“Let us depart, fly, go far away from the world,”

it said. "Let us brave its laws and let us make for ourselves a new law." These are the reasons which the folly of love eternally gives as its justification. Exquisite words which have been repeated since the world was, and shall be as long as hearts are weak. Charming commonplaces with which the hearts of women are caught, as if a certain poetry of emancipation were the preface to the fall. As long as the world lasts and creates obstacles to human passions, the same aspirations, the same refrains will lead to the same deceptions. It is an air which each one can adapt to his own voice.

Georges, seated in his study, littered with maps and books, had commenced, destroyed, then recommenced a letter to Sylvia, in which he wish to detail more precisely than when he had spoken to her, his plans of flight. His mother, who had entered to speak with him, had surprised him writing feverishly something which he quickly concealed under a blotting-pad at her approach.

For a moment the marchioness was tempted to question her son. To whom was he writing? Why did he conceal what he was writing?

But these indiscreet questions would doubtless have received no answers. Too much a woman not

to partly divine, the marchioness was sure that this stealthy letter was destined for Mrs. Norton.

“What folly can he be meditating?” she thought.

She would, perhaps, have asked what it was, if a servant had not entered to announce Mr. Richard Norton, who wished to speak with M. de Solis.

The mother suddenly became anxious, looked at her son, who calmly responded with a smile, as if to reassure Madame de Solis.

“I am very glad. Show him in.”

“I am going to leave you,” said the marchioness, before Norton entered. “But why does he come here?”

“A visit. He has the right to visit me.”

“Promise me that you will repeat to me all that he says.”

“What do you think he will say to me?”

“Promise me,” said the marchioness, firmly.

“Oh! willingly I promise you.”

Richard appeared a little annoyed on seeing Madame de Solis, but she soon took her leave, not wishing to be indiscreet; and confident in the promise of her son, she had the courage to return to her chamber without trying to learn from Norton's first words whether he came as friend or enemy.

However, the first minute of conversation would have enlightened her.

When the marchioness had left the room, Norton looked at Georges, who, seated before the table, pointed to an arm-chair, in which seating himself, the American began, coldly:

"You have guessed why I come?"

"No," said the marquis.

"You are going to fight this evening"; he took out his watch. "You are going to fight in five hours with Colonel Dickson."

"Yes," said M. de Solis.

"The meeting was to have taken place this morning, but was put off at the instance of the colonel's seconds."

"You are well informed," said Solis, simply.

"That is as much as to say," said Norton, impassively, "that I also know the cause of the duel."

Georges looked at the American. Under their beetling brows the gray eyes of the Yankee betrayed a feverish flash, although he was evidently trying to remain calm.

"If you know the cause of this meeting," responded the marquis, "you know there is nothing dishonorable in it, either for myself or for the person I am defending."

"And in not naming her to me, you show that you have no right to defend her."

The marquis tried to smile.

“An honest man always has the right to take the defense of slandered innocence.”

“Not when, in undertaking to defend her, he exposes her to a new calumny,” said Norton.

Seated opposite each other, the glances of the two men crossed as their swords might have done; and M. de Solis, forcing himself to remain calm before the husband demanding his rights, replied:

“I went straight to her as soon as I heard this calumny.”

“Well,” said Norton, “in fighting for an honest woman, you compromise her. I alone have the right to defend her honor, which is mine as well.”

“You mean——”

“That you must not fight with Colonel Dickson, and that, the colonel having insulted Mrs. Norton, it is to me that he must render an account for the outrage.”

M. de Solis remained silent for a moment, and then with a slight smile which seemed to mark the impossibility of this substitution of adversaries he said:

“I have sent my seconds to the colonel. The meeting is decided upon. The hour is fixed. I can-

not, under any pretext, afford not to be at a rendezvous which I myself have demanded."

"And yet," answered Richard vehemently, "for the honor of her of whom we have been speaking, it is imperative that Colonel Dickson's adversary should be the husband of Mrs. Norton."

"Why?"

"You do not understand," said Norton brusquely. "We are here as two men who can and must speak the truth to each other. You would fight for Sylvia because you love her. I intend to fight for her because I intend that she shall be respected. The situation is clear, I think."

Georges had become very pale, "It is because I intended she should be respected that I forbade Colonel Dickson—"

"And by what right?" said Norton. "I am still her husband. It is my privilege alone to take charge of her who bears my name, and as long as she bears that name I shall claim that privilege. And it is the best means, I think, to silence the tongue of the slanderer."

"As long as she shall bear your name?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing—nothing which can be for you a hope, or for her a deliverance."

Norton," said M. de Solis in a tone in which there was an echo of the old-time friendship.

The American looked at him with his haggard eyes and in a hoarse voice he said:

"Do not question me. Do not utter another word!"

"But, my friend——"

The word "friend" caused a cloud to pass over Norton's face.

"Be silent in the name of that friendship which, it appears, has not prevented you from robbing me of the affection of her whom I love better than anything else in the world."

"Robbing?" exclaimed the marquis, rising suddenly.

"Taking away, carrying off, what matters it what word is employed? The fact is, that suffering sits at my fireside; there is desolation and deception in this heart ready to burst." He struck his breast as he spoke with his clenched hands. "It means pain, torture, separation, divorce! Oh! God!"

"Divorce." The word was like a clap of thunder. Divorce? Georges had not thought of it. Divorce? He, who was dreaming of liberty, had not thought of the one and only means to attain it, and it was Norton who brought him the suggestion. Almost under

the hand of the loyal man, concealed under the blotting pad, there was the letter, the guilty letter, destined for the wife, in which he had said: "Let us emancipate ourselves, let us be free, let us fly."

"You think, perhaps," continued Norton with an accent of suffering, "that you love her whom you once met, and who pleased you. Not so! I will tell you what it is to really love. It is to live solely for one loved creature, knowing that the existence which she is sharing with you is torturing, is killing her. It is to give her back the liberty, which our laws permit, and then to carry with you through life, for consolation, the memory and the joy of the sacrifice. That is true affection, true love, true devotion. The rest is desire—or empty phrases."

"Norton——"

"You wish to fight with Colonel Dickson because he has insulted her. I, more than he, have calumniated her. I have cast into her very teeth——"

He paused.

"Ah! I was mad. But my anger overmastered me. And then the suspicion——"

"The suspicion?"

"Yes," answered Norton frankly. "I suspected you. I accused you! And why should I not have accused you? But yet, you were not so vile, I am

certain, being my friend, as to take away, with the peace of my fireside, the honor of my name. I am sure you would not have done that.”

A vague, rapid gesture was the only response of the young man. He could not utter a word. The thought of the infamous letter was plunging the steel into his heart.

Richard went on:

“But knowing that in her heart she still kept green a memory of the past, you have had the vanity to see if it were really dead; if it could not be endowed with new life; if this woman did not still remember your name. You have blown your breath upon the half extinguished embers of that love, and for what purpose? That Sylvia’s heart, which had come to me so slowly, touched by the devotion of a whole life which I had given her, I, who could not inspire her with the passion born in an hour—you have done this, that her heart should be alienated from me; that I should become jealous, and finally mad enough to suspect and threaten my wife. And what does all this matter to you? You are only playing a role! What is a friendship, even that of a brother, compared with the love for a woman, even though it date but from yesterday? Ah! Let the husband suffer! Let him weep; it is

his lot. Let the lover invade the home and destroy the fireside! I love with all my soul, and I have the right, it seems to me, to be loved."

"I swear to you," said Solis.

"You have inspired her with a passion, have you not?" interrupted Norton, drawing himself up to his full height. "Passion explains all, answers for everything. Be it so! Love this woman since she loves you, but I repeat to you, and I have the right, and it is my duty to repeat it to you, as long as you can in the eyes of the world defend her only at the expense of a blight upon her name, leave the duty of defending her to him who is her protector in the eyes of the law."

"Mrs. Norton is the purest woman in the world," cried Solis.

"For that reason I want no one to interfere in the defense of her honesty. That must be my duty and mine alone."

"Once for all, you insist upon this?"

"I insist," said Norton, "and I say again distinctly that it is to me and to me alone that Colonel Dickson must account for his insulting utterances. The world will not have to ask, in that case, how it happens that Mrs. Norton, who has a husband to defend her, must depend upon a stranger for this service."

"A stranger who venerates her!"

"Speak the whole truth—a stranger who loves her. And this other truth, namely, that the world, our world, this famous world which creates opinion in France, would in that case suspect her, brand her, and she would be ruined."

"I cannot make an apology to Colonel Dickson," said the marquis firmly.

"You can fight him in a week from now, upon any pretext you may see fit to make, if the colonel after our meeting is then in a condition to fight. But this evening the colonel will find me upon the field. Montgomery will see to that."

"That is your determination?" said Solis.

"It is my command," answered Norton.

"And now?" The marquis wanted to hold out his hand to this man, to beg his pardon, to vie in generosity with this iron king, this man of dollars, of figures, of business, of herculean labors, yet more chivalrous than a nobleman in his manly sacrifice, in the stifling of his love. He, Georges de Solis, the bearer of a knightly name, had thought of eloping with Sylvia, and Norton gave her to him. Divorce! Norton was sacrificing himself for her.

"And now," answered Norton coldly, "I have nothing more to say to you,"

He went out before M. de Solis found the courage to say a word. He stood silent and self-accused, listening to the slow, heavy footsteps of Norton as he strode down the stairway.

When the marchioness, who, alone, had been thinking of stories from the police courts, in which the injured husband, armed with a revolver—the American revolver, another form of *mildew*—suddenly appears between the wife and the lover—when Madame de Solis, uneasy for the result of the interview, re-entered her son's room, she asked:

“Well?”

“Well,” answered Solis, “Richard Norton is the most loyal of men.”

And the marchioness noticed that Georges had been burning a paper in the flame of a candle which was still lighted, and the cinders were floating about the candlestick like the wings of consumed butterflies.

CHAPTER XII.

After his interview with M. de Solis, Richard Norton wanted to see Sylvia. His decision had been made the evening before. He had loved this woman too well to become her executioner, and since Dr. Fargeas was inflexible, he would leave her in France. He alone would take his place on the *Normandie*. He wanted to show Mrs. Norton how much he loved her.

Sylvia was just putting the last touches to her toilette when he announced himself. She was putting on her hat, and her maid, whom she dismissed on seeing Richard enter, was handing her her gloves.

"You are going out?" he said.

"I was about to follow Dr. Fargeas' recommendation to take the air."

"I regret to delay your walk, but I want to speak with you, Sylvia. I will not be long. I must explain myself entirely, coldly. It is an explanation quite necessary to our common dignity, our common peace of mind."

Sylvia took off her hat and sat down, facing Norton.

“You will have leisure to make your explanations, as you call them. I was going among the fisher people, to that poor hut where, it seems, I was seen the other day. It would not have been Eva this time, but myself whom they could have followed and spied upon in all reality. But I have changed my plan; I shall not go.”

“Would you like me to send to these poor people what you intended to take?”

“No; little Francis will come in a few moments if he does not see me. I have given him the permission. I was late. He is probably already on his way.”

There was on Norton's lips a sad smile, and in a voice calm, almost sweet, though it was evident that he was making a strong effort to master an inner emotion which well nigh betrayed itself in spite of him, he said, looking at her with infinite tenderness:

“You are distressed about people who are suffering from poverty and you are right. I know nothing more lugubrious. But there are other sufferings which merit a little pity.”

“I, who know so well what it is to suffer, can have pity for all sorts of suffering,” she answered.

“Then you ought to understand what the pain of jealousy is and to what lengths it impels a being who loves.”

There was a tone of remorse in his words, an excuse for his late violence. But Sylvia's moral wound was so recent and her suffering had been so intense that she could not pardon him.

"I do not easily admit," she said bitterly, "that jealousy can justify a thinking being in outraging and threatening another as you have outraged and menaced me."

Norton was mechanically twisting the point of his red beard.

"You are right in talking to me with this frankness. I wanted to talk to you about these same outrages and threats."

"Again?"

He shook his head with the air of one tired, resigned.

"Look at me, Sylvia! Am I the same man as yesterday? I have thought, reflected much. I have lived over again in a few hours, my whole life. Beside myself with rage, I was capable of carrying you off as a prey to America, whither I have too long delayed my return—on your account—and where I soon intend to go."

A movement of impatience escaped Sylvia.

He went on: "You will notice that I no longer speak of your going with me. No, I should not ask

you to follow me, even were Dr. Fargeas to assure me that you have no further need of his care. You do not thank me? Well, I do not blame you. You see I have reflected deeply."

"Indeed," she said with astonishment, "I do not recognize you;" and she gazed at him with her handsome deep eyes.

He replied, not without a little pride: "You should rather say that you do recognize me! That would be more just. I thought I had taught you to esteem my devotion before giving you cause to dread my anger, the explosion of which, I repeat to you, I deeply regret."

"You are right," said Sylvia. "I ought never to have forgotten your past kindness. I beg your pardon."

"You would never suspect, I am sure, the resolution I have taken after the long and bitter reflections of these last hours. You do not love me, Sylvia. I do not believe that you ever did love me."

"I do not--"

He interrupted her quickly: "Oh! if I am no longer angry, neither have we reached the stage when studied politeness is in order. You obeyed your father in marrying me; your heart was in the keeping of another."

She met her husband's look with her clear eyes and answered with the frank sincere accent of an honest woman:

"When I married you I thought of no one else, hoping that my new life would never bring regrets and certain that I would keep always, loyally, the oath I then took."

"Yes," said Norton.

And as if out of the depths of the past a far-off voice, a voice ironically cruel, had repeated to him the words of the marriage vow, he now repeated it slowly with a voice at times broken—that oath they had taken under the bell of roses: "I swear to be faithful to him whom I have taken, in good as well as in evil report, in health as in sickness, in poverty as in riches."

Resuming, he said: "You have kept your oath, Sylvia. In accusing you I have been unworthy of myself and of you. I who swore to give you absolute happiness. I have not kept my oath. I have not been able to do so."

Sylvia did not understand him, but all her preconceived notions of fairness revolted instinctively against the accusation which this man brought against himself. She had a sudden impulse to protest, which he quickly repressed by a gesture, con-

tinuing his confession in a cold, firm, saddened tone. "God is my witness that I have done all in my power to make you happy. I have had no other ambition. I know very well that I was never a hero of romance, and that the existence I offered you was, for a nature like yours, a little monotonous, a little severe. But what could I do? I have so many things in my head. I have swarms of human beings depending upon me, and who live by me. And besides, I had such a feeling of devotion for you that I hoped you would not regret the past. Ah! well, I was mistaken. I am too violent, too brusque. I have not learned to keep the heart which I so much desired to possess alone. I saw you—with what despair God knows—becoming pale, becoming each day more and more melancholy; and when I learned, here in this land where I hoped you would recover your health, that instead you had found again—what?—all that you were longing for. When I learned that what was wearing out your life and breaking your heart was a dead love—no, not dead, but a dormant love—then I was no longer master of myself. All my own affection for you revolted, words of bitter anger came unbidden to my lips, like sobs, and I let fall utterances, perhaps irrepara-

ble, but which I regret from the bottom of my heart, and for which I beg your pardon."

"Pardon?" cried Sylvia. "*You* ask pardon of *me*?"

She recalled Georges' words. She had heard them, she confessed to herself, with a secret pleasure. She almost wanted to cry out and confess her guilt. And it was Norton who asked *her* pardon.

"I hope, Sylvia, that you will forget that hour of anger, in view of the years of affection and respect I have given you. I should never be able to forgive myself for leaving you with any other memory than that of a man whom you once respected, if you did not love him."

"A memory? Why, what do you mean?" She felt that the final supreme word of this interview had not yet been spoken and she was awaiting it, anxious, terrified.

"It is very simple," said Norton, firmly. And repeating with a kind of persistence as if he felt a pleasure in inflicting suffering upon himself, he went on:

"You do not love me. You will never love me. The life I have prepared for you, in spite of my good intentions and of my love, is killing you. The union so ardently desired by your father, and accepted by

yourself, has become a prison. The law gives you a means of escape."

"The law?" stammered Sylvia.

"Yes; divorce." He had at last uttered the word. She started.

He continued, coldly:

"Nothing is simpler. Unhappy with me you may be happy when free. If I were not to accept this solution I should be selfish. I may be rough and violent, but I am not selfish, Sylvia."

"And it is *you* who wish—"

"It is I. I love you well enough to make the sacrifice. This is the conclusion to which the reflection of a night has brought me. I do not say that I suffer any the less for having reached it, but that matters little. Man is made to suffer."

"But if I do not accept?" she said eagerly.

He lifted his eyes to her and said softly:

"Why, is it a sentiment of honor, of gratefulness or of charity which prompts you? I might be convinced of your devotion, but I should not be long in repenting my course when I saw that you regretted it. I have told you what I have resolved to do and I will do it. In my rough, rude life, in which I have nothing to complain of, I have accomplished all I wished— all except to be loved. It depends on me

to show you that I was worthy of you. You shall judge which is the greater—the love which desires simply or that which can sacrifice itself.”

“Is your wish a command?” asked Sylvia, after a moment’s reflection.

“A command,” he answered. “Yes, a command. It is the last I shall make. Fate has willed that the joy of having a babe be denied us. I have often counted upon the sweet voice of a dear little being to bring you closer to me. No, all is well. Divorce is bad only when it strikes at innocent children. In separating unhappy parents, the children have everything to lose. We are free. I would have neither the right nor the courage to break our marriage, if between us there was a poor child to suffer.”

He added resolutely: “I have already consulted a lawyer.”

“A lawyer?” repeated Sylvia.

“A lawyer is necessary for the legal part of it. All you have to do is to live apart from me in France during a certain time; a year, I think. This will be sufficient to justify a separation, I should say a divorce. But I intend that the demand shall be so formulated that all the wrongdoing shall appear to come from me. The document once drawn up, Mr. Cadogan will bring it to you here, with me,

and that within a few hours. You will only have to sign it and—”

“Mr. Cadogan?” she interrupted.

“You know him?”

He suddenly paused, on hearing a noise, and asked himself who was there.

Some one knocked at the door. Norton could not help a movement of irritation.

“I have said all that is necessary,” he continued, “but it appears that we are not to be alone.”

“It is Eva,” said Sylvia.

The voice of the young girl, heard through the door, calmed Richard's fears, and he went himself to open the door. He found himself face to face with Eva, who was pushing before her little Francis Ruaud, timid, bashful, his cap in his hand, his hair tangled and unkempt, as it always was, but with clothes cleaner than usual.

Eva was holding him by the shoulders, for he seemed to be on the point of escaping.

“Go in,” she said. “There is Mrs. Norton and Mr. Norton; he will not eat you, child.”

The child, with an awkward air, hanging his head in a shamefaced way said: “I know that, Miss, but—my shoes—they are all muddy—” And he pointed to the wet leather of his coarse shoes.

"This boy insists on seeing Sylvia," said Eva, dragging the urchin to Mr. Norton. The little Francis stood silent, waiting to be questioned.

"Why did you come?" asked Sylvia.

"Because, madame," he said, twirling his cap, "you said if you did not come to mamma's I might—"

Eva looked first at Norton and then at Sylvia with the vague instinct that she had interrupted a serious conversation. What was it then? Could the coming of the boy Francis be embarrassing to them?

"Is anything the matter with you?" she asked of Norton.

"With me?" said Richard. "Nothing; ask Sylvia. What do you suppose is the matter with me?"

Then turning to Francis he said: "So, my boy, you came to see Mrs. Norton."

"Oh! nothing important. Mamma said like this—said she—'since the lady does not come, go to the villa, and do not forget, Francis, do not forget.' As if I could forget."

"It is your mother who has sent you?" asked Sylvia.

"It is mamma."

"Is she better, poor woman?"

"Oh, yes, madame."

The child stopped, scratched his head and added:

"I say yes, and it is yes and no. Yes, as far as she is concerned, and no as to papa."

"How?" asked Eva. "Is your papa Ruaud sick also?"

Francis nodded his head sadly:

"Oh, do not speak of it. My old ones seem to have bad luck. When it is not one it is the other. Mamma got up and began to go about; you know, mademoiselle, her lame back; well, she was cured of that when papa, on getting out of his boat last Wednesday, stumbled, his foot slipped, and he fell, his knee striking on a stone, and it all swelled up, oh! so big. The doctor says it may be very serious. They talked about an operation. That is what mamma told me to say to you. Oh! that would not be nice, to have only one leg."

"Poor man," said Sylvia. Norton had come near the boy, and looking at him said:

"Then your father is very much discouraged naturally."

A queer light flashed from the sea-green eyes of the boy, and with the cunning of his race he replied:

"It is very strange how it all came about, sir. It made my heart big, to see my father stretched out there, his leg in a machine, an apparatus they called it; and yet this accident, it may, perhaps——"

“May what?” asked Eva.

The boy hesitated as if afraid to speak.

“Go on,” said Norton.

“I do not know whether it is proper for me to talk so much,” he said. Then resuming:

“After that, you know how things were between papa and mamma; you have seen it—their quarrels. They did not seem to suit each other. They kept finding fault with each other. It is true that papa was oftenest in the wrong,” and the child made the motion of drinking, “and it is likely when he fell and hurt his knee, that it was because of too much *calvados*. But at heart he is not bad, my father Ruaud. And yet! ah! mamma would have no more to do with papa. Oh! it was all over and they were going to separate.”

The eyes of Norton and Sylvia met as by instinct.

“To separate?” said Norton.

“How?” said Sylvia.

“*Dame!*” ejaculated the child. “Mamma had grown tired of working for nothing, because if father had courage to work, he was weak and allowed a crowd of idlers and good-for-nothings to drag him to the cider shops. And it took a good many catches of fishes and turtles to pay his score for the rounds of brandy and cider. Then mamma said at last, ‘It

is too much; you can not see your way clearly. You have a film over your eyes like the last year's whittings. I break my back to keep the house neat and tidy, do not go into debt, and yet at the end of the year everything has gone for *chopines*. We will go, each his own way—you to your bottle, I to my sewing. That is what I think.' And they kept thinking about it, about going away—he this way, she that, and they would have done it one of these fine mornings. And when the father said, 'You know what it costs to separate,' the mamma said only, 'It costs the trouble of gathering up your traps and going straight before you. Oh! we need no judges! no tribunals. You go to the right and I will go to the left. I have had enough of it.' "

"And you, Francis?" asked Eva. Norton was pale and Sylvia kept her eyes upon the ground.

"In all this trouble," said the child, "I paid for the broken pots; what else could I do? Between the two I could not choose—truly, I love them both. I said to myself, if it comes to that I will work with papa and when I have saved some sous, or a white piece, who knows?—well, I will carry it to mamma. But thank the good God! I do not think I will have to do that. They had been quarrelling, the old ones, the morning of the day when father, on getting

out of his boat," and Francis made a motion descriptive of a man falling, "and that time I thought all was over for sure. Oh, such a scene as it was! I tell you! Mamma had already made up her bundle and she cried, how she cried. 'No, it is not possible,' she said."

"She cried, did she?" said Norton, slowly this time, seeking Sylvia's eyes.

"*Dame!*" repeated the child. "To separate! The very thought of it, papa said, gave him a queer, squirming feeling in the stomach."

"And then?" said Sylvia.

"When they brought him home like that in their arms, stretched out on two oars, so pale, the father, white as a sheet, then, oh! then, mamma said nothing more. She went right to taking care of him with her own hands. No, I am a little mistaken; at first she said: 'Well, you are in a pretty fix, and now I'll have to suffer for it.' *Dame!* she was right; the poor woman has had enough trouble and worry over it. Twenty times a day, on that day, she would say like this: 'It is very true that I was going to leave you in the lurch, old man, and now I cannot do it, and I will have you on my back, Ruaud, with your bottle and your bad company. But I cannot leave you now. Even if I had the chance, it is not the time to

leave you now. Besides, we have grown accustomed to pulling in harness together. Well, where the goat is tethered, there he must browse. We will stay together.' When I heard mamma say that, I said nothing, you understand, but it made me feel happy, very happy."

"And she will stay?" asked Sylvia.

"And your father?" inquired Norton.

"He? You ought to have heard him. He said, 'Who knows; maybe we must be unfortunate before we can love each other! Kiss me, old woman, come!' When I saw them with their hands clasped and their eyes wet, I said to myself that I should not be sorry for the accident if it reunited them. It is so hard to have those you love constantly misunderstanding each other."

"We need, perhaps, to be unfortunate to be able truly to love each other," said Norton, repeating the fisherman's words.

He was thinking that misfortune had not brought him happiness, no, not happiness. But as if he feared after the odium of his brutality, the ridicule of a supersensibility, he shook his head and demanded sharply of the boy:

"Where is your house, my lad?"

"Over yonder! On the road to Tourgeville," said

he, smiling at Eva. "Mademoiselle knows the way very well."

"I will go with you," proposed Miss Meredith.

"No, I will go with you," said Richard to Francis. "I have to go out."

While Sylvia was much moved by the memories which the child's innocent prattle had aroused in her, Eva said to Norton:

"How excited you are!"

"Do you think so?" he replied. "It is the story of this fisherman, perhaps. See here! As I have something serious—a business matter—to accomplish, I wish first to perform an act of charity—something to bring good luck, as in gambling."

"Then you are going to Ruaud's?"

"I am charitable for a selfish reason—yes. Do you stay with Sylvia."

"Why?"

"She will tell you, perhaps."

Then with a sign to Francis he said: "Come on, little man."

Sylvia had turned. "Where are you going?" she said.

"I told you a moment ago, and I will return soon."

"Soon?"

"Since you wish it," he answered smiling.

As he was about to go out the little Ruaud paused on the doorstep, and saluting Eva and Sylvia, at the same time scraping the floor with his feet, he said:

"Ah, madame! Mamma not only said to me to tell you about the accident which happened to papa but also to wish you a thousand prosperities. Au revoir, madame, mademoiselle."

After the child had gone with Norton, Sylvia, nodding her head, mechanically repeated:

"A thousand prosperities." These wishes for her happiness fell upon her heart with an ironical cruelty. Where was happiness for Mrs. Norton to be found now?

CHAPTER XIII.

On seeing Norton leave the house it seemed to Eva that some concealed drama was about to be enacted, something which would bring misfortune. Between Richard and Sylvia she felt sure there had been exchanged, perhaps, harsh words. And why had Norton gone away in such nervous haste, a manner which was not habitual with him?

What if M. de Solis had, after all, deceived her? "What if Norton—" These last words she had unconsciously pronounced aloud and they awoke in Sylvia the same anxiety.

"Norton?" repeated Sylvia, who asked Eva to complete her thought.

"I am sure," cried the girl, "that Richard is going to act as one of M. de Solis' seconds."

"What! Richard?"

"M. de Solis is going to fight. He must fight. And it is evidently Richard whom he has chosen for second—"

"Do you think so?"

"That is why he seemed so moved a moment ago. Oh! I ought to have guessed it."

"Why it is quite impossible that Norton should serve as M. de Solis' second," said Sylvia.

"Why? They are two friends. Two brothers almost."

"I tell you it is impossible—impossible. But if there is a meeting it may be between—"

"The marquis and Colonel Dickson," completed Eva.

"Are you sure? And if it were," said Sylvia, into whose mind a new thought had come, "between Norton and—"

She stopped suddenly, recoiling before her own supposition.

"Oh! I must be mad," she said. "He has gone off with Francis Ruaud. Suppose he were to go—"

"Where?" said Eva. "Besides, if Richard has confided nothing to you, it is because there is nothing to confide. Richard loves no one in the world except you. He would have no secret from you."

"He loves no one in the world except you." Eva did not note Sylvia's expression and the rapid flush which spread over her face. There was something like shame in this stealthy change of countenance, and Mrs. Norton, ill at ease, remained silent, thinking with the strange sensation of a mind half-wandering, disturbed to the bottom of her soul, of this

moment in her life when all the rest of her existence was hanging on the cast of a die, depending upon the result of a game of hazard.

She was drawn from this sort of stupor by the entrance of a servant, who announced Mr. Montgomery.

Eva was joyous. Mr. Montgomery would tell them, perhaps, what was going on in the outside world.

The stout man entered, wiping his forehead and looking anxious.

"Mrs. Norton, Miss Eva, good morning! Where is Norton?"

"He went out just now," said Eva. "I thought you would want to see him."

"Without doubt—without doubt!"

"For the duel?" asked Eva.

Montgomery appeared astonished.

"The duel? You know about it, then?"

"We know, yes. What more about it?"

The American shrugged his shoulders, fanning himself meanwhile with his handkerchief.

"Oh! yes, the duel. It is not that, however, which troubles me. I am worried because Norton does not know—but the duel is over with; it is all arranged."

"Arranged?" And Eva joyously looked at Sylvia.

"Yes," said Montgomery, speaking rapidly, "there is no use in talking more about that. But——"

"But what?"

"Nothing, nothing, I assure you, Mrs. Norton. Business matters which concern Norton and myself——"

"But you seem agitated, Mr. Montgomery," said Eva in a serious tone, feeling that some new danger was threatening.

Montgomery tried to smile: "I agitated! Ah, no! I am a little warm, that is all. It is very hot on the beach."

"And then this dispatch——"

"What dispatch?"

"From New York."

He felt that he had said too much and tried to recall his words, or at least to explain them away: "Oh, insignificant, insignificant!"

Eva regarded him fixedly.

"You can tell us all, Mr. Montgomery. What you have to tell my uncle is serious."

"Oh! no, not serious, not very serious. It is interesting, however."

"But you have just said the dispatch is insignificant."

Montgomery replied quickly:

“Absolutely insignificant and—and—interesting. That is it exactly—interesting and insignificant, like all dispatches.”

He stammered, very ill at ease, sorry to have said too much and dreading to say any more.

“Ah! there is Liliane,” he said, with the air of a drowning man to whom some one has thrown a life-preserver.

It was indeed Mrs. Montgomery, who entered like a whirlwind, arrayed in a toilette of mastic and a Gainsborough on her pretty head.

“Ah! my dear friends, it is I. Have you a glass of water or of port—no matter what—that I may refresh myself with a little? I am in such a fury.”

“What is it?” said Montgomery.

“Liliane will tell us what the dispatch contains,” said Eva.

“She knows nothing about it,” said Montgomery softly.

Sylvia held out her hand to Liliane:

“Where do you come from, dear friend?”

“Where do I come from?” and Mrs. Montgomery screamed rather than spoke: “From a cave, from a den. I come from Harrison’s.”

Montgomery made a grimace.

"The great painter?" asked Sylvia.

The handsome Liliane interrupted her in a loud tone:

"Harrison a great painter! Don't speak to me about him. Never speak to me again about Harrison. Bah! a great painter. He is a fourth rate dauber."

"Ah!" exclaimed Montgomery enchanted.

"A man who exacts thirty-five sittings of two hours each—thirty-five times two—seventy hours of immobility."

"Of immobility?" said Montgomery.

"Absolute; like that I have just undergone."

"That is true," said the husband. "I had forgotten. To-day is the first sitting."

"A man who has given me a crick in the neck; who would not let me utter a single word, but made me sit perfectly still like a manikin. 'A little more to this side, please, Mrs. Montgomery—there, that is better. Take that pose over again, I pray you, Mrs. Montgomery. Ah! thank you.' That would have gone on for thirty-five days. No indeed! No! Nothing but the rough sketch. And his rough sketch is bad enough in all conscience. And then, can you imagine it, he didn't intend to send my portrait to the Salon. He already has two pictures for the

Salon. A naiad, after Miss Arabella, and a portrait of Arabella herself on horseback on the beach. Arabella! Arabella always! Too much of Arabella. The portrait of Arabella is the more insolent, that it is superb. Very much better than mine would have been, mine which would have turned out bad, horribly bad."

Liliane walked up and down as she talked, filling the room with her petulance. Montgomery contented himself with saying, coldly:

"Well, it is natural that Miss Dickson's portrait should be the better painted. She will not pay for it you know."

Liliane looked at her husband quizzically, shrugging her shoulders.

"You think so?"

"Well, to be brief, what do you intend to do about your portrait?" insisted her husband.

"The devil take it and Harrison with it! What a fright he has become! How he has aged! Why it is incredible!"

"Ah!" said Montgomery ironically. "The agonies of art!" The husband was enjoying his triumph.

Mrs. Montgomery was implacable. She continued her tirade against the painter.

"He? Agony! Well that is good. Harrison suf-

fering agony for his art! A maker of pretty faces for women! He has no more fervor when he paints than has a tailor when he cuts out a jersey or a waist. If you could see his sketch of me! Little eyes, like that! An abominable nose! Oh! I will never look at the horror again, never, never, never! Do you want me to tell you what I think of your Harrison?"

"My Harrison?" said Montgomery stupefied.

"Yes, he made me just such a portrait as a husband would! That is the kind of a painter he is."

"Thanks!" replied Montgomery. "But what would you have? He has avenged himself. Everybody is not magnanimous."

"Like the Montgomerys."

"If you will," said Montgomery, "we will speak of Harrison later, or we will not speak of him at all if you like. At present I must absolutely find Norton."

Turning to Sylvia he said: "He has gone out, you say?"

"To the fisherman's hut," said Eva. "You know _____"

"To Ruaud's?" said Liliane. "I know the way."

"And then he was going to the telegraph station," added Eva.

"I will go, then," said Montgomery.

"And I will go with you," said Liliane. "A turn on the beach with you, Lionel, is so rare."

The fat little man turned as red as a ripe raspberry and sighed:

"Ah! if I were not so anxious, how happy I would be."

"Anxious!" she said. "You were about to tell me. A husband ought to tell his wife everything," added Liliane, in a low voice.

He only answered by making signs, meaning to call his wife's attention to the presence of Sylvia and Eva.

"Everything, my good Lionel." She took his arm, and he, beaming with happiness, said:

"You are charming. Oh! how glad I am that Harrison failed in your portrait."

He turned toward Sylvia, saying:

"If Norton comes back I will return."

"We will see each other again," said Liliane, gaily.

He went out with his wife, who, while they were descending the stairway, murmured, with her rosy mouth close to his scarlet ear:

"You are going to tell me everything, are you not, Lionel?"

Eva felt more and more the menace of some

danger, and in spite of the affirmations of Montgomery, she was sure that the New York dispatch, of which he had spoken was not so insignificant as he would have her believe. Montgomery had so many interests in common with Richard. Did not his feverish air prove that there was as much peril in America as in France?

The young girl no longer dared to question or reassure Sylvia. A profound silence fell upon these two women, absorbed in their thoughts, enveloped, as it were, with an atmosphere of dread.

It appeared to Sylvia that she wanted to be alone—alone to enjoy the memory of Georges—alone to say to herself that now that liberty which she had longed for, which Solis had dreamed of, was within her reach. Divorce would give it to her. And with this liberty there was the possibility of uniting her life to this man—the man who had disappeared for five years, and who had reappeared—for her a living dream—a possible happiness. Yes, she wanted to be far from Eva, to think of him, and to ask herself what she should now do.

“Let us fly!” Georges had said.

But she had no need to do that now. She was free, once more, legally free. Divorce would emancipate her.

She might yet be the wife of Georges. How happy he would be when he should know it.

“Happy!” The word arrested her thought.

Why did a vague anxiety come over her? Yes, he would have been happy to find love in that flight which without divorce would have been a fault—a crime——

She rose, choking, almost trembling at the idea, which the young girl might almost read in her eyes.

“Where are you going?” asked Eva.

“To my room.”

Eva did not dare to ask any questions, feeling that there was some trouble, something tragic in that heart in which was written the name of Georges de Solis.

Miss Meredith, now left alone, had never been so sad in her life; She really wanted to cry. She tried to reassure herself, but her melancholy persisted, and on this beautiful summer's day, under the calm blue sky, she felt as if something unknown and terrible were hovering over her. Inaction became irksome. She had an impulse to go out and ask for news, as if by running to meet the danger (since there must be a danger) she might avert it.

But undecided, hesitating, she remained where she was, in a sort of torpor, looking out of the open

window at the sea, while the time passed. Suddenly she started. Some one was coming without. Who could it be? Some one to tell her of Richard or of Georges?

She rose quickly as if moved by an electric shock.

It was Madame de Solis. The marchioness, in spite of the smile with which she received Eva's salutation, had an air of preoccupation which struck the young girl. Certainly outside the villa, some drama was taking place. But since the mother was there, Eva would know.

She went forward joyously, saying:

"Why! is it you, marchioness?"

The marchioness took the young girl's hands in her own, saying:

"Yes, my dear Miss Meredith; I am enchanted to find you here. I come to speak to Mrs. Norton. I have something very serious to say to her."

"Very serious?" asked Eva.

"And very painful."

"Ah! I thought so," said Eva. "My God! what has happened?"

"Do not be alarmed, my child, I have come to remedy matters if that is possible."

"Remedy? Then there is some great calamity?" asked Eva turning pale.

“No, not yet, but there is a great danger. Do not ask me any more questions, I pray you. Do not be surprised either at what I am about to say to Mrs. Norton. My words may astonish you. They will be startling in appearance—very startling—extraordinary. Remember, though, that they have but one object, the happiness of your uncle and that of Sylvia—and—who knows?”

She stopped suddenly.

“Who knows? What?” asked Eva anxiously.

“Yours, perhaps,” answered Madame de Solis.

“I do not understand, madame.”

“You have no need of understanding. You have only to listen and to keep still. And once for all, do not betray any astonishment. I am playing a serious role and I must play it as I please. I have already gained a large stake on the one side and I wish to win one on the other, here. Now I would like to see Mrs. Norton.”

“I will notify her at once,” said Eva.

“Thanks.”

Eva rang and sent a servant to announce that the Marchioness de Solis wished to speak with Mrs. Norton.

For a moment the marchioness and Eva remained silent, neither daring to pronounce a new word.

Madame de Solis was rehearsing in her mind her entire plan of campaign which she had arranged as she came, and the young girl dared not question her, feeling her heart beat in an agony of apprehension.

Sylvia on entering was much astonished at finding herself face to face with Georges' mother, and the latter was struck with the pallor of the young woman.

"I beg your pardon," she began, "for forcing your doors, but I have some matters of the utmost importance to communicate to you."

"Please take this arm-chair," said Sylvia, while Eva mentally repeated the words of the marchioness.

"My words will have but one object—the happiness of your uncle and Sylvia."

Mrs. Norton, too, was thinking. She was thinking of those wild, feverish words which Georges had spoken to her when he supplicated her to fly—to fly with him.

"All my life to love you," he had murmured, he whose mother was there before her, trying to smile.

"The matter which brought me here is this," she said. "You have seen Mr. Montgomery?"

"He was here an hour ago," responded Sylvia.

"And doubtless," insinuated the marchioness, "he told you of the news which inspired an article in the

New York *Herald*, much commented upon this morning?"

"No; what is the article?"

"I regret very much," replied Madame de Solis, coldly, "that Mr. Montgomery is not here. He would have explained far better than I the matter to which reference is made in the newspaper article. Especially as Mr. Montgomery is a little—how shall I express it—implicated in the article."

"Implicated?"

The word seemed strange to Sylvia, and Eva asked quickly:

"With what offense does that journal charge Mr. Montgomery?"

The marchioness affected a careless air, a worldly, conversational tone, as if what she was saying did not cover up a world of disaster and grief.

"With what does the New York *Herald* charge Mr. Montgomery? Oh, exactly what it charges upon Mr. Richard Norton."

"But," said Sylvia firmly, "Mr. Montgomery is the partner of my—— of Mr. Norton, and I wish to know——"

The marchioness smiled.

"What good will it do? They are calumnious reports."

"The more reason to know whence and from whom they come," said Sylvia.

Madame de Solis was toying with her hat ribbons.

"From whom?" she said carelessly. "Oh, that is simple enough. From some stockholder who has been injured in his interests. A man who has been ruined has neither pity nor moderation."

"A man who is ruined!" cried Sylvia. She had been sitting thus far during the interview. She now rose and stood erect and haughty.

"Madame," said Eva, trembling.

The marchioness interrupted her.

"Ah! Miss Eva, you are not very obedient. You promised to let me talk without interruption."

"And I," said Sylvia, feverishly, "I ask you to go on and tell all."

"All?" asked Madame de Solis, putting an almost insulting cruelty into her tone.

"Yes, madame," said Mrs. Norton. "There are some kinds of reticence which are outrages."

"Well, then," said Madame de Solis, "I will tell all. But—"

She paused, listening to a sound coming from the ante-chamber.

"It is Paul, M. de Bernière, my nephew. I do not know whether I ought before him."

"You may speak of what concerns Mr. Norton before everybody," said Sylvia, with dignity.

Bernière had entered and had saluted Mrs. Norton, then Eva and Madame de Solis, the latter responding only by a bow.

"Do you know, Monsieur de Bernière," asked Sylvia, "what Madame de Solis has just told me?"

"What is it, madame?" said Paul, pretending not to understand.

The marchioness quickly explained:

"What they are saying about Mr. Norton's mines."

Bernière became very much confused, turned red and almost gasped:

"Oh! my aunt! Here? Why do you talk of it here?"

"Here above all," said Sylvia. "I want to know all."

"Very well, my dear madam," answered the marchioness, "I shall tell you, the more so as my nephew has also heard the story. In fact, it is the talk of Trouville, of Havre and of all the coast. You know there are as many centers of gossip along the seaside as there are ant-hills in the woods. Each has his little stock, his corner, his tales and his venom."

The word was like a wound to Sylvia, and in pro-

portion as the marchioness talked, the pain became more stinging.

“His venom!” repeated Eva, her lip curling proudly.

“Oh!” said Bernière, “one should pay no attention to such things.”

Eva listened as if she were the victim of some horrible nightmare. What cruel part could the marchioness be playing? Though she had been warned not to be astonished at anything, the young girl felt all her pride, and her respect for Norton, rise in revolt, and she found it necessary to make an effort to repress her violent nature in order to let Madame de Solis go on plunging needles, one after another, in her palpitating flesh.

“I admit,” said the marchioness, “that my countrywomen are quite disposed to pour acid on a wound. The Parisian reporters will meddle in it. I foresee interviews. But, in the present case, it is the Americans—your Americans, my dear Eva—who seem to display the most activity, bitter, venomous activity, against Mr. Norton?”

“Against him? He has never done them any harm. On the contrary, he has loaded them with benefits,” said Miss Meredith.

"It is for that reason, perhaps, that they are inimical to him," said Bernière.

"Yes," continued Madame de Solis, "it is perhaps for that reason that they pretend—and this is the rumor of which I spoke and which I wish as a friend to denounce—they pretend—they really ought to put a stop to such a calumny—they pretend—but really, I dare not, in spite of your pessimism."

"I begged you to do so, madam, and I now demand it," said Sylvia, incisively. "They pretend what?"

She waited to hear this scandal as a brave soldier waits to receive the ball which is to end his existence. She held her head proudly erect, and upon her face was a look of defiance.

Bernière was trying in the meantime, speaking in a low, supplicating tone, to reduce his aunt to silence.

Madame de Solis did not listen to her nephew.

"Well," she continued, "they say, they pretend, assert—oh, it is all a story."

"A vile romance!" interrupted Bernière.

"They tell a story that Mr. Richard Norton bought lands in the West, I do not know where; that he dug a well without finding a single drop of oil.

One day, behold—a miracle—the oil spouted forth! A lake of oil! A fortune! There was a call made on the stockholders. Now, Paul, explain what you have heard said of it. We are here to find out the truth.”

“The truth,” said Bernière. “But these are calumnies, my aunt.”

“Evidently,” said Madame de Solis.

“Go on; they are indeed calumnies,” said Sylvia with a gesture of command.

“Well, they say that after this call made upon the interested stockholders, a committee was appointed to verify the report. The committee examined the well—I only repeat what the *New York Herald* says—it examined the well. Yes, it was indeed mineral oil. Samples of it were brought back and distributed to the stockholders.”

“A dividend,” said Madame de Solis, coldly.

“A liquid dividend,” added Bernière.

“The only one they will ever receive,” the marchioness went on, her lips drawn in an ironical smile, “for the well, the famous well, is now as dry as our sand beach here. Not a drop of oil—of that oil bought in Pennsylvania, says the *New York Herald*, carried West and poured in the well by—confederates.”

"In short, a theft," said Sylvia, frigidly.

"A theft! How you do run on."

"It is a shame," said Eva, whose handsome face was livid. She did not hear Madame de Solis, who said to her: "Be silent."

"And," continued Bernière, "if we were not persuaded that the whole matter was a base slander, I would not have dared to make an allusion to the unworthy reports which do not even merit the disdain and contempt we have for them."

Eva sank upon a divan, where she sat, her interlaced hands between her knees, the picture of indignation.

"What have we done to all these people, that they should insult us without even knowing us?"

"Nothing," said Bernière. "You have done nothing to them. It is because they have nothing to do."

"See what they have invented," cried Sylvia. "See what they are peddling about for the want of something better to do, out of sheer idleness, simply to pass the time—as people look at the hulk of some dismantled, old vessel half buried in the sands on the beach. Norton has cheated his stockholders! He has invented this infamous robbery! He has committed this theft! And how? These Americans, with their *business!* Where does he come from?"

Out of what social rank does he come? Why did he not stay at home? He brings here his money, his luxury, his activity, and even his charity. But whence comes this money which he so freely gives to the poor? Who is Richard Norton? And first, why is he so rich? What adventurer, what filibuster is he? Oh! it is worse than that. They now say bluntly, so it appears, that he is a thief, a swindler! Well then, they lie, they lie I tell you! We can tell them to their faces," she said, looking at Bernière and Madame de Solis, "that they lie, stupidly, cravenly lie!"

In the fragile form of this invalid there raged an ardent, generous energy, the energy of an honest wife, who takes up as a challenge the insult which has been offered to the being she honors and respects.

Madame de Solis looked at the young woman, adorable in her anger, her eyes aflame, and her hair partially disarranged falling upon her brow.

She longed to embrace her, but restrained her impulse, and like a woman of heart, who knows the heart of a woman, she went on, determined to test her experiment to the end.

"All the more have they lied," she said, with icy phlegm, "since Norton's real situation is a sufficient answer to these slanderous reports."

"What situation?" asked Sylvia.

"It is serious, but it does him great credit. And I have come here to bring words of consolation, true and sincere, in this hour of his ruin."

"Ruin!" echoed Eva.

Madame de Solis assumed the alarmed air of one who has committed an imprudence and wishes to soften its effects.

"How! Do you not know?" she said. "Why, Mr. Norton has told me all about the condition of his finances and his latest resolution. His attorney, Mr. Cadogan, happens to be my friend."

"His attorney?" repeated Eva, while Sylvia stood there silently, her eyes lost in the vague distance.

"Why, yes, to be sure," said the marchioness; "but I have been so indiscreet! I have brought you bad news. Why, it is impossible that you did not know——"

"What?" asked Miss Meredith. But Sylvia answered: "Eva, dear Eva."

Paul de Bernière took several steps toward the door as if to go out.

"I think I shall go," he said; "I beg your pardon——"

Eva spoke. "No, no," she said proudly, "there

is no secret in Richard Norton's house which everybody cannot properly hear."

"Well," replied Madame de Solis, that separation. Mr. Cadogan is coming—yes, I have it from him—is coming to bring the papers for the divorce."

Eva looked at Sylvia, searching with her feverish eyes those of the young wife. Sylvia remained silent.

"You do not answer," said Eva. "Is it true then? Is it possible? Oh, my poor uncle! Oh, Sylvia, Sylvia."

"We must be just," explained Madame de Solis. "It is Mr. Norton who wishes this separation. But Mrs. Norton is right in accepting it, entirely right. Firstly and above all we must consider our own happiness, our own destiny. He will suffer, no doubt; have you not suffered for years? He is saddened, he is unhappy; but do we not all have to bear misfortunes? Especially when those dear to us have to suffer? Be reasonable, Miss Eva, Mrs. Norton is young. She will be free. She would indeed be a fool not to live the life she has coveted, without troubling herself about him whose name she has borne. What is a name indeed? At best but a memory."

"Madame!" said Sylvia.

“We forget the dead,” added the marchioness. “Divorce is a widowhood which permits us to forget the living. And now since they accuse Mr. Norton ———”

“Since they slander him,” corrected Sylvia.

“It is the time to show that the wife is perfectly irresponsible for the faults, for the existence of her husband——”

“Even when that husband would give his life for her,” said Eva indignantly.

The marchioness took her by the hand:

“Sh! You will spoil all.”

“But my good, dear aunt, you are a very scorpion,” thought Bernière astonished. And he looked at the Marchioness de Solis with a profound stupefaction, as a man who should suddenly see his walking stick move, writhe, hiss and become a viper.

CHAPTER XIV.

While the marchioness, with the cruel skill which her experience in life gave her, was enlarging and irritating the wounds she had made in Sylvia's bosom, Richard Norton, the husband, was bringing to the villa the lawyer whose visit he had previously announced to his wife.

It was not without a certain repugnance that Mr. Cadogan accompanied his countryman. The man of law did not think absolute cause for separation existed in cases like the one in question. He was a man of some sixty years, hale and strong, with thick white hair and magnificent teeth. His closely shaven face denoted force and character. He was a man not easily moved.

"I think you are very good," he said, "to shatter your existence because Mrs. Norton is suffering. She would become resigned with patience and time. Age softens many pangs."

"I wish," said Norton, "that Mrs. Norton may be free before she is old."

This reasoning seemed to Mr. Cadogan a little sentimental. But Norton, no longer a child, could

regulate his destiny according to his will; and if Mrs. Norton was willing to accept a divorce——

“Are you sure she will accept?” asked the solicitor.

“I am sure.”

“So much the worse! I do not like divorces. I have procured many. I live by them, but I detest them. I think they are stupid; but what is to be done about it? I have seen so many marriages, believed to be ill-assorted, which time has ameliorated as it does wines. Incompatibility of temperament! Oh! yes, when we are twenty—thirty years old. But when we have grown older. Ah! a compatibility of ills restores the equilibrium. Rheumatisms to care for become a mutual school of disarmament and resignation. I have seen an aged husband tend, with the devotion of a saint, his old paralytic wife, whom when young he pretended, and believed, he detested. Had they been divorced she would not have found the same care, nor he the same sensibility. Nurses are worth more in the economy of the world than lovers. Habitude and selfishness are as powerful as love; and if the latter originates life, the former complete and round it out.”

But Mr. Cadogan had not come to enunciate his

own personal theories. Norton was bent on divorce and the solicitor would prepare the steps to be taken. He had told his client what his own private opinion was. It remained for him now, only to perform his duty.

Norton took him into the room where Sylvia was, surrounded by Bernière and the two women, and, with a solemnity not at all theatrical, he said:

“I present to you my friend, Mr. Cadogan, solicitor.”

Then going straight to Sylvia and speaking in a low tone, he added:

“I am glad that the act which is to terminate our union is to have witnesses. They can repeat some day, if necessary, the declaration I am about to make.”

Sylvia, very pale, seemed to beseech him, by a look, to discuss this dreaded question privately; but as if he did not understand the mute appeal of the young woman, he took a black leathern portfolio from the hands of Mr. Cadogan and drew from it a paper, which he presented to Sylvia, saying, in a clear, firm voice:

“Here is the first signature which you are to make in order to be free, Sylvia.”

“Free!” she thought, recalling all the temptations

and dreams which the word suggested. It was the ardent wish of Georges. Free! It was what the young man had caused to shine for her in the horizon, like the dawn of a new existence. It was also the burning aspiration of her repressed, monotonous life. Free!

“Your name at the bottom of this document, and Mr. Cadogan will take all the steps necessary to be taken in the courts of the United States.”

“A very simple procedure, madame,” added Mr. Cadogan. “The simple fact that you are living in Paris while Mr. Norton is living in New York, will give you the right of divorce after the lapse of one year.”

Madame de Solis and Bernière stood in the corner of the room, spectators of this drama, while Eva, like a suppliant, approached Sylvia, who, still standing, her eyes fixed, seemed hypnotized by something invisible, far away, toward the sea.

Into the midst of this silence Mrs. Montgomery entered, and contrary to her usually tempestuous style, she glided with stealthy steps into this chamber of agony.

Norton, always impassable, but with a voice a little changed, was saying to Sylvia, who seemed transformed into a statue:

“A year! you understand? You have to wait one year before you are free. But to-morrow I shall have disappeared from your existence. And I want it distinctly understood besides, madame—and I say it here publicly, as before a tribunal—I want it to be understood that if either of us has been guilty of not knowing how to assure the happiness of the other, it is not you, whom I respect, and shall honor always, but it is I.”

“Richard!” cried Eva, taking Norton’s hand as if to prevent him from continuing.

He shook her off gently. “Let me alone,” he said.

He looked at Sylvia, and it seemed to him that upon her lips there was half formed the word he had just uttered, “Free.”

“Your name there, madam,” said the husband, pointing to the place on the paper where she was to sign. “You have only to place your signature there, and that liberty of living in accordance with your wishes, of which our union has deprived you, will be restored to you.”

“My signature?”

Mr. Cadogan added, “If you wish to read the provisions of the document, madame.”

“For what reason?” she asked.

"They are all in your favor," said Norton.

Sylvia took the paper, looked at it a moment, and then said slowly:

"Then it is liberty, is it?"

"Yes."

Madame de Solis had approached Mrs. Norton. She whispered in her ear:

"He is ruined. He is poor."

"One question," asked Sylvia. "Your fortune. It is compromised, they tell me."

Richard shrugged his shoulders.

"What matters that to you? I shall regain it—honestly, loyally."

"You will regain this fortune alone?" she asked, looking him in the face.

"Alone."

"Well," she said, lifting her head, "and what will you do with your companion of all these years? She has shared your luxury, she will share your poverty."

He recoiled, as if some one had suddenly struck him; and Sylvia with burning eyes, repeated with a sort of exaltation those words she had repeated in the past, those words of devotion, of duty.

"You will take this man in good, as well as evil report, in health as in sickness, in poverty as in riches—"

She stood there superb, her head high, the integrity of her soul speaking from her eyes:

“This act which you have presented me, with what name shall I sign it? With my maiden or my married name? You do not know—” here she turned toward the marchioness—“ what they say of you. They say you have robbed the stockholders in your mining company. Norton, a thief! An infamy! Well, this name of Norton, which you have given me, I will keep, since it has been insulted.”

With her nervous hands she had torn in pieces the paper which her husband had given her and had thrown the fragments on the floor at her feet, as if she would have trampled upon the calumny itself.

Eva was weeping. Norton, pale and ready to faint with joy, he whom the most cruel experiences had not shaken, held out his strong hands to Sylvia, while the marchioness, in a joyous voice, said to the young woman:

“It was necessary that he should suffer to make you understand his value. It is I who—”

“You?” said Norton.

“Yes, I. In attacking you before her. It was risky, but I knew what the heart of a woman is like. It needs but a tear to nourish the flower of pity, and with pity comes—”

"Love?" asked Norton tremblingly of Sylvia, who was looking at him fixedly.

The Yankee was now ready to shake off his accusers, as a bull shakes off the dogs which hang to his flanks.

"What does poverty matter to me? My whole life answers for me. And with you, Sylvia—ah, with you, I shall begin another existence."

"If they accuse us here, we must stay," said Sylvia. "If it is over yonder we must depart, whenever it pleases you."

They had paid no heed to Mrs. Montgomery, who, much moved, had listened to all. Tears had come into her laughing eyes, which she quickly wiped away, for she did not wish them to be red.

"Would you believe it, my aunt," said Bernière to Madame de Solis, "I was mentally comparing you to a viper—imbecile! You are a New Foundland—"

"Exactly," said the marchioness. Liliane had also approached the Madame de Solis:

"Very well, oh! very well!" she said, "you are an excellent woman, marchioness."

"A little selfish also," answered Madame de Solis. "I think of myself, too. Hold! your husband," she said pointing to Mr. Montgomery who was entering.

To speak by the card, he was not entering. He was bounding forward out of breath and seemed this time full of information.

He seized Richard's hands and squeezed them until the bones were nearly broken.

"Ah! my dear Norton, my dear friend and partner! Good news, great news! The well, the famous well! Yes, there is oil at last. I ask your pardon, Liliane," he said, excusing himself, "but oil's the word."

"Oh! Lionel, come, that is equal to the painting," said Mrs. Montgomery.

"Well, the wells have literally spouted oil. They are superb. There is an immense output, a veritable lake of oil, a fortune!"

"You ought to have seen the colonel," added Montgomery. "Dickson, I mean. For I posted the dispatch at the Casino. He was just starting to Paris and he actually turned green—literally green—chrome green, as they say—"

He stopped suddenly.

"Starting to Paris. But how about that duel?" asked Eva.

"Oh! that was a simple, inoffensive demonstration. The colonel declared that he had not the least intention—he was very modest about it. He could

have taken a fort in America, but at Trouville he took—the train.”

“All the same,” said Bernière, “I regret Miss Arabella.”

Liliane laughed. “Oh! you who are such a traveler, you will meet her at another *table d' hôte*—in a better society.”

And while they were talking, Norton, less affected by the news brought by Montgomery than by Sylvia's smile, said to his wife:

“We will leave for New York as soon as possible, my dear Sylvia. Yes, as soon as Dr. Fargeas shall sign your *exeat*. And whatever has been our experience here, we will always have a pleasant memory of France. Eva, also I hope.”

“For my part,” said Eva, vivaciously, “if Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery are willing to allow me to occupy a corner of their hotel in Hoche Avenue, I shall ask my uncle to let me stay a little longer. I like—”

“What?”

“I like Paris—yes, Babylon. You need not try to convert me!”

The marchioness kissed Eva on the forehead, murmuring, “My dear child!”

“They will say,” mockingly whispered the pretty Liliane into the ear of Madame de Solis, “they will

say that the marquis is going to marry an American—the mildew!”

“Naughty one!” said the marchioness.

Liliane thought that after this day of storms, Mr. and Mrs. Norton, who must have much to say to each other, should be left alone. She led away Madame de Solis, whom she accompanied to her lodgings. On the road Montgomery expressed his astonishment that misfortune had brought together these two beings, when it had separated so many others.

“How prosy you are, Lionel,” said Liliane with a delicious pout on her rosy lips.

“And yet,” said the marchioness, “it is very simple. There is a latent heroism in the heart of every woman. I am certain that under more than one Red-fearn costume there beat hearts as noble as that of the Pauline of Corneille. Occasion only is wanting to develop true heroism. It is not every day that we have tortures and wild beasts to brave, as in the time of Polyencte. But the Paulines would be easily found if the lions of the hippodrome were true lions. The sublime changes its costume like all the rest. If they had arrested Sylvia’s husband in the time of the revolution, she would have cried, ‘*Vive la Gironde,*’ or ‘*Vive le roi,*’ according as he might

have been Girondist or royalist, and would willingly have followed him to the scaffold. It is no longer necessary to brave the guillotine, to share the lot of a husband. But there is always to be found the instinctive, feminine devotion to brave that other pocket guillotine called calumny. Mrs. Norton has chosen to remain faithful to the honor of her husband's name. She is the heroine of *Corneille* over again. The one is worthy of the other, or rather they are identical. Pauline dies; Sylvia condemns herself to live and kills her love. The ancient French poet would have said to our handsome American, 'Bravo, my daughter!' But I must ask pardon for my chatter. What a prosy lecturer I am. Good-evening, I am tiring you."

"No, no," said Liliane, "it is not necessary to occupy a professor's chair in order to be a philosopher. One can teach psychology in talking. Thanks, madame."

They separated. Madame de Solis was thinking that maybe she would have more difficulty in coming to an understanding with her son. Men are more unreasonable than women. Was the marquis in his apartment? She would broach the question at once and have it out with him, if she had to wound him to the heart in so doing.

He was in his room, looking out into the distance watching the waves, in the falling twilight, under the glow of the sky, still reddened by the setting sun.

“Ah, my child,” said the mother, arousing him from his reverie, “will you be frank with me? Answer. You wanted to elope with Mrs. Norton. What did you say to her, confess now, in that letter which you burned?”

He did not answer.

“You are not willing to confide your secret to me? You cannot? That is right—all the follies of love are sacred, like debts incurred at play. It is only common, everyday honesty which is not so. Well, you proposed some madness to that woman. May I guess it? Another sky, another country. The duo of *Favorita*. Oh! all that is out of style since Wagner’s time. Do you know what she would have said in answer to your letter if she had received it? Firstly, she would not have answered it. Or rather, her husband would have taken that office upon himself. In fact he has done it without knowing about your letter. And I bring that reply to you.”

“Her husband?” said Georges astonished.

“Yes, her husband. Oh! never fear. She has not

told him that you wished to fly with her, for I am certain that was your intention. It was very plain to me that you had the symptoms of a certain peculiar fever—the fever of elopement. No, she said nothing of all that. But take notice. At this juncture, Norton was unworthily attacked, slandered. They even said he was ruined. They said even worse than that. But it appears that at the bottom of Mrs. Norton's exquisite heart, she still kept a tender and loyal feeling for this brave and gallant man who is your friend. The wind of aspersion has blown upon the almost extinct cinders of that tenderness and kindled it into a blaze and—”

“And what?” asked Georges, anxiously.

The marchioness did not continue her theme. “I give you pain,” she said. “But if you knew what joy an honest woman feels in knowing that honest women are not rare, whatever is said to the contrary! I know an honest young girl, too, who I think is delicious. Without going so far to find her, there is Miss Eva—”

Georges de Solis made an impatient gesture, which, however, did not deter his mother:

“The name,” she thought, “is not then indifferent to the marquis.”

“In short,” concluded the marchioness, “Mrs.

Norton will start for New York one of these mornings."

"With him?" asked M. de Solis.

"What is there in that to astonish you? Yes, she will go with him unless Norton stays in Paris, which is possible, or unless Dr. Fargeas sends them to the Pyrenees before letting them make the voyage, which is probable. But if I see the dear doctor I will tell him that all his valerian pellets are not worth my cure."

And as Georges regarded his mother with an air of stupefaction, she added, softly:

"Yes, my cure. I have cut to the heart of the malady. You were a couple of fools. Mrs. Norton has nothing better to do than to love the husband who adores her, and you than to try to adore some one who already loves you."

And she added, laughing:

"You know it is not Mademoiselle Offenburger to whom I have reference."

Then the marchioness was silent, feeling that she had said enough for one evening, perhaps too much.

Georges de Solis remained where he was until night, watching the immensity of the sea, the lamps of the lighthouses and the golden points of the stars. It seemed to him that a night, an immense

night, was enveloping his whole life, was veiling his future as with a curtain of crape. Then in this night, there was, as it were, the glow of a dawn, an aurora soft and rose colored. Some vague influence came upon him like the cooling caress of an evening breeze in summer, a breeze which coming from afar has passed over gardens of flowers.

When, on the morrow, Mrs. Norton received Dr. Fargeas, she was transfigured, happy. He noticed a volume lying upon a gueridon, which he opened at a page determined by a book mark.

"*Rossetti—The House of Life.*" "Ah," said Fargeas. "I did not know you—"

"Oh, it is one of my favorite volumes," answered Sylvia. "I had lent it to M. de Solis, who sent it back to me this morning."

The doctor read slowly from this *House of Life* the marked sonnet, marked by chance, perhaps, the sonnet xcvii, which the marquis had designated by the book-mark.

"My name is: Who might have been! And I am also called Never more. Too late, Farewell."

"It is very pretty," said the doctor, "very pretty." He laid the volume down and added: "Poetry is not always the music of fools. It is the counsellor of sages as well. It could be employed

to good effect in medicine. Good-bye, dear madame, and accept my compliments on your regained health. After you have passed three weeks at Luchon, as I have prescribed, you can make the voyage to New York without any fear. I will answer for all now."

That same day, on the beach, as Liliane Montgomery was walking with Miss Eva, both looking charming in their fresh, cool costumes under their bright umbrellas, they met Georges de Solis, who was striding along, his eyes on the ground and his face wearing a woe-begone expression. Liliane marched straight to him, saying:

"Monsieur de Solis?"

He bowed, as if coming out of a dream.

"Monsieur de Solis, we are on our way to take some aid to our friends, the fisherman Ruaud and his family. Will you accompany us?"

"I?" said he, hesitating.

"Yes; come and visit our poor charges with Miss Meredith."

As he was about to excuse himself, Mrs. Montgomery interrupted, vivaciously:

"Yes, yes, you will come."

Making Miss Eva, who was visibly blushing with pleasure, pass before her on the plank-walk, she

whispered in her ear, while Georges was saluting the pretty little American:

“Come along, marchioness!”

THE END.

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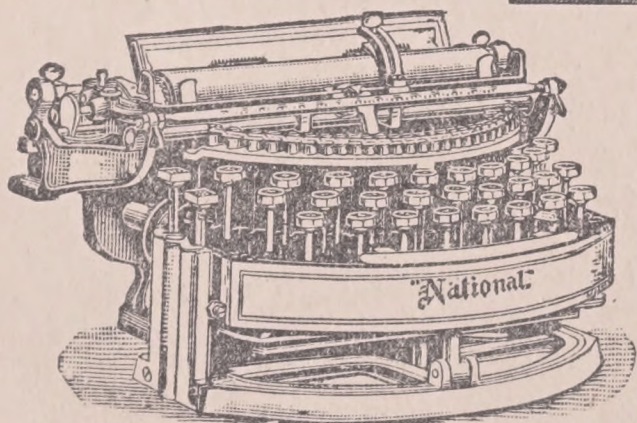
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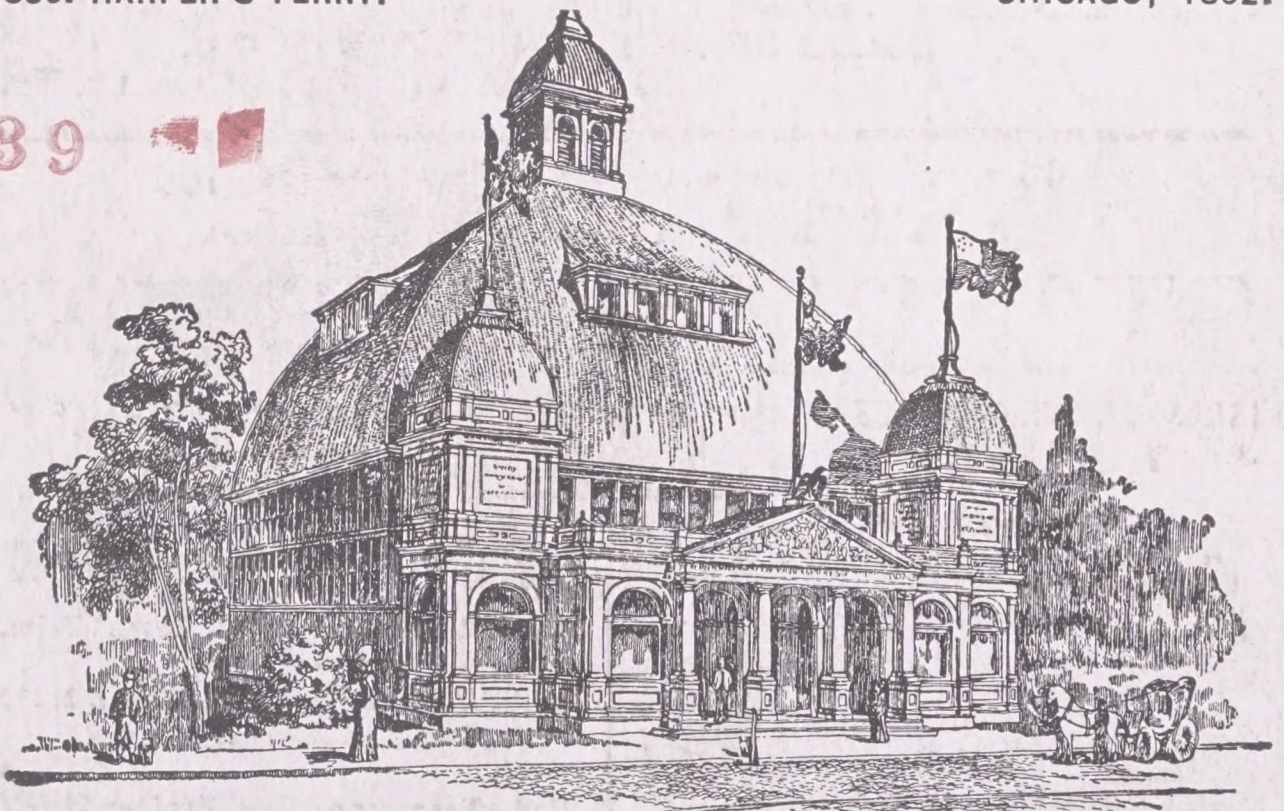
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